TRAINING IN LITERARY APPRECIATION

F. H. PRITCHARD

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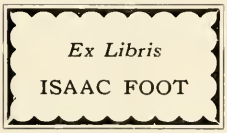

TRAINING IN LITERARY APPRECIATION

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TRAINING IN LITERARY APPRECIATION

AN INTRODUCTION TO CRITICISM

BY

F. H. PRITCHARD

SENIOR ENGLISH MASTER AT DEVONPORT HIGH SCHOOL
AUTHOR OF "ENGLISH EXTRACTS AND EXERCISES"
"STUDIES IN LITERATURE"

Appreciation is akin to creation.
T. S. ELIOT, *The Sacred Wood*

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PREFACE

LITERATURE, like life, is not to be defined. We may study it, note its forms and signs, feel its rhythmic throb; but we can never say exactly in what it consists. As soon as we think that we have found a satisfactory definition, there comes an awkward but undeniable exception to put us to confusion. Literature defies the foot-rule, and any attempt to treat it as if it were an exact science is bound to fail.

It is, however, equally mistaken and pernicious to suppose that because we cannot acquire the ability to tell a good book from a bad one by some process akin to that by which we analyse a salt or extract the roots of a quadratic equation, the task must therefore be given up as altogether hopeless. The average reader sadly needs guidance, and the failure of some of the older methods does not justify the assumption that it is impossible to meet this need. It is, indeed, a most dangerous heresy which says that there is nothing to be done for the reader but to impart to him a knowledge of the rudiments, and then leave him to work out his own salvation as best he may. The result of that policy is seen to-day, when we have a very few readers of discrimination, and a great majority to whom ' book ' and ' novel ' are synonymous terms. We are all readers now, if by that is meant the ability to go from title-page to colophon with a certain amount of comprehension of the matters of fact contained by the print. But if the ability to weigh, to judge, and to appreciate is meant, then comparatively few of us dare

lay claim to the title. So much we must cheerfully recognize before any further progress can be made. We have but taken a step or two in a very long journey, and we cannot afford to loiter ; nor can we neglect any light that will help us over difficult and obscure places. In a former book, *Studies in Literature*, I have endeavoured to show that such help may be given to the beginner as he sets out upon his way. In the present volume the work which was there begun is extended upon more systematic lines. The idea is not to put the reader out of conceit with a swift and thrilling narrative, but to show him how much more there is if he will but cultivate the seeing eye and the hearing ear. In short, the aim is to broaden the basis of enjoyment. The reader will certainly not be less susceptible to the excitement of rapid movement because he has learnt to appreciate those subtler beauties of which the best literature is full.

Exercises and suggestions for further reading are appended to each chapter. It is hoped that these hints will indicate how any interest that may be aroused by the chapters themselves can be most usefully directed. The only justification for a book of this kind is in the awakening of a desire for individual effort.

I am indebted to Mr Egbert Sandford for his kind permission to use the poem, *Listening to the Wind*, quoted on page 84.

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TRAINING IN LITERARY APPRECIATION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

> Who reads
> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
> Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
> Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself,
> Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys
> And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge,
> As children gathering pebbles on the shore.
>
> MILTON

IT is common to hear a reader complain because a book has made too great a demand upon his patience and attention. He stigmatizes the book as dry, and its author as inefficient; it rarely occurs to him that he himself is probably at fault. His *rôle*, so he thinks, is a passive one merely. He feels that nothing can be expected of him other than the ability to read the letter-press. It is the author's business to cultivate whatever qualities of learning or style may be necessary, and he should not levy too great a tax upon the reader's patience. So much being taken for granted, the reader will proceed to pass an airy judgment upon the writer's work according to the amount of pleasure or instruction it has afforded him at little cost.

But there is another side to the question. The great French critic Sainte-Beuve tells us that "the first

consideration . . . is not whether we are amused or pleased by a work of art or mind, nor is it whether we are touched by it. What we seek above all to learn is whether *we were right* in being amused, or in applauding it, or in being moved by it." Matthew Arnold quotes these words with approval in his *Critical Essays*, and adds that what we require above all things is a literary conscience. There is a right and a wrong, a good and a bad, in books as well as in morals.

Certainly the reader should never be content merely to take a passive part. The relation between reader and writer, if it is to produce the best result, makes as great demands upon the one as upon the other. " The reader," says Mr E. J. Payne, " must meet his author half-way ; he must contribute something more than a bare receptivity." If one must show learning and industry, the other must have a passion for knowledge and a willingness to work, or at best he will behold a purposeless exhibition of mental gymnastics that may excite his curiosity for an hour, but will leave him not a whit stronger. Similarly, if the writer should have the gift of investing his words with sweet music, the reader must have a cultivated and sensitive ear to catch the tones. Carlyle remarked on one occasion that " to sit as a passive bucket and be pumped into can be exhilarating to no creature." That is perfectly true here. As readers we must be active; our faculties must be wide awake; we must be able to judge for ourselves. It may not be desirable that we should all be writers, but it is imperative that we should all be efficient critics, not in the sense of gratuitous fault-finding, but in that of the ability to seek out and to appreciate the best.

This can only be done by the cultivation of literary taste—taste that will enable us to fasten upon what Addison called the specific qualities of an author; to delight in a good story well told; to have an eye for the beauties of landscape; and an ear for the subtle changes and recurrences of verbal music. We may laugh at Mr Tulliver's astonishment when he discovered that, in dealing with books, "one mustn't judge by th' outside." "They was all bound alike—it's a good binding, you see," he explained concerning a purchase he had made, "and I thought they'd all be good books." Without doubt we know better than that, but we cannot afford to scoff at the crudity of Mr Tulliver's literary standards until we are sure that our own are better. To say with assurance, "I know what I like," is not sufficient. We must be able to give a sound reason for our preference—a reason that will accord with those rules of literary right and wrong that no individual whim may abrogate.

The first step is to see that the formation of literary judgment is no light matter. Many questions have to be answered before a book that the casual reader dismisses so easily can be given its due place. We have to consider its form; why it was written; and whether it was primarily intended for reading aloud, for private reading, or for acting upon the stage. We must have some idea of its date so as to get the right perspective, and not judge a sixteenth-century book according to twentieth-century notions. We shall take care to grasp the main idea and note how it is developed, nor shall we neglect to notice any qualities of harmony, rhythm, and style that the work may have, and to see how all these help in the general effect.

There are those who would decry such a method as incompatible with the free air of the spirit of literature. They deprecate attention being paid to mere craftsmanship as a wilful misplacement of emphasis. Leave genius alone, they say, and do not attempt to analyse his effects. Inspiration, and not mere artistry, we are reminded, has given us our greatest works. The geniuses themselves, however, have never so belittled their art. Let us hear Dryden on this matter : " We must not only choose our words for elegance, but for sound—to perform which a mastery in the language is required ; the poet must have a magazine of words, and have the art to manage his vowels to the best advantage, that they may go the farther. He must also know the nature of the vowels—which are more sonorous, and which more soft and sweet—and so dispose them as his present occasions require."

It is indeed strange reasoning that would desiderate technique for the musician and the painter and deny it to the writer. Words require as careful artistry in their choice and manipulation as do pigments or sounds. A recognition of this fact does not in the least commit one to the absurdity that technical knowledge of itself will make up for lack of inventive genius or that the observance of certain rules will compensate for a want of imagination. So also the superior person who waxes mightily contemptuous over criticism, and dubs it a barren and futile pursuit, is mistaken. The writer must be able to execute, and the reader trained to enjoy. Both capacities are essential to the appreciation of literature.

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

The necessity for the reader to be active and to take pains to fit himself for his reading is well put in Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (Lecture I, par. 12). Hardress O'Grady also deals with this aspect of the question in the first chapter of his *Reading Aloud*, where he refers to reading aloud as one of the surest methods of recognizing good writing. The student should also read " Is it Possible to Tell a Good Book from a Bad One ? " in Augustine Birrell's *Selected Essays*. The subject of literary taste is dealt with very effectively in R. A. Willmott's *Pleasures of Literature*—a book that deserves to be more widely known. Reference may also be made to Arnold Bennett's *Literary Taste*, though I am unable to agree with his advice to the reader to begin the study of poetry with *Aurora Leigh*. Pope's *Essay on Criticism* is worthy of attention for its good sense and sound judgment. There is a delightful chapter dealing with literary appreciation from the teacher's standpoint in W. S. Tomkinson's *The Teaching of English*.

EXERCISES

1. Write down the titles of three books that you do not like. Endeavour to state frankly what you feel to be the reason for this aversion ; whether it be some shortcoming on the part of the writer or a lack of sympathy, patience, or knowledge on your own.

2. Shelley once wrote of a guitar : " It talks according to the wit of its companions." Show that this is also applicable to books.

3. Write down the titles of half a dozen books that you have read recently, and classify them according to the demand made upon you in reading. Comment on the nature of that demand in each case, and say whether you consider the return to be commensurate.

4. Make a list of some general principles that should guide one

in giving or recommending books to others. Consider how you would deal with the following cases :

(*a*) One whose only reading is the newspaper.
(*b*) A man who reads much, but only books in which he is interested professionally.
(*c*) An omnivorous novel-reader who will touch nothing that does not come in the guise of fiction.
(*d*) One who reads widely but very superficially.

5. Pope says, " True ease in writing comes from art, not chance." Discuss this statement in connexion with the general question of craftsmanship in literature.

CHAPTER II

UNITY AND CONTRAST

That vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity.
EDGAR ALLAN POE

THAT a piece of writing, like any other work of art, must have unity is a truth so obvious that the reader is likely to miss its real significance. It is more than to say that it must be a unit, and it does not imply that it must be complete. There must be a ' wholeness ' about it, yet it need not be a whole. *Kubla Khan*, for instance, has unity though it is but a fragment. The principle of unity provides that the writing must convey one main impression to which all the details must contribute. It may be of the tranquillity of evening, as in Robert Bridges' *Winter Nightfall*; or of rollicking boisterousness, as in one of Browning's *Cavalier Tunes*; or of tender regret, as in Hood's *Fair Ines*. In any case, all incongruity or irrelevance that would tend to destroy the main impression must be avoided. On the other hand, the diction, the length of line or sentence, and all the other details that go to make up a bit of literary workmanship must definitely help. The length of the work does not matter. Lockhart's *Life of Scott* and one of Leigh Hunt's essays, Shelley's *A Lament* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, must all conform to the same principle. The writer has to make up his mind what it is that he wants to do, and impart to his readers some confidence that he can do it.

But the reader has not merely to sit in judgment upon the writer. His work is not purely receptive. He has to get the keynote essential to the due appreciation of the work, and, should he fail, must be sure that the blame is not more fittingly laid at his own door than at the writer's. He has to see that time and circumstances are favourable ; that there is nothing in his mind that distracts or confuses ; and that he has the mental equipment necessary for the full enjoyment of the work. Charles Lamb pleaded for a " grace before books," and certainly we do both ourselves and the writer an ill service in approaching his work without thought or preparation.

It is important, then, that the reader should get in tune before he commences to read. He must be sure that the main idea jumps with his mood. A short story by W. W. Jacobs will give delight at a time when *Paradise Lost* would be wearisome, and this fact may be recognized cheerfully without our being tempted to draw hasty conclusions concerning the respective merits of the two. For the less apparent converse holds good that there are times when the humorist ceases to amuse and only the deeper note of Milton will secure a response. If, when that time comes, the reader has not fitted himself to appreciate Milton, then the loss is his.

It is necessary to recognize this unity in all literary work, but it is also necessary to go a step farther and see in what it consists. The good craftsman knows well enough that but for the dark there would be no knowledge of the light. White is never so dazzling as when placed next to black. So we must have contrast as well as unity. Indeed, it would be more correct to say that contrast is essential to the preservation of unity. It is the business of art to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable qualities

of diversity and likeness, and from them to make a whole. A writer who aims at unity alone will lose it in a dead monotony that will have no artistic effect whatever. On the other hand, the one who is obsessed by the necessity of producing contrasts will achieve only zebra effects that startle, but can never charm. Byron's

> Love watching madness with unalterable mien

is an example. The two figures are so evenly balanced that there is no rest for the mind's eye as it glances first at one and then at the other. There is no resolution and no finality—in short, no unity. It is the sort of contrast which is, as R. L. Stevenson remarks in another connexion, " of that glaring description which we count too obvious for the purposes of art."

The sister art of painting will provide us with convenient illustrations. Let us imagine the picture of a night scene where all is deep gloom but for a single gleam of light coming from a cottage window. The light does not destroy the unity of the picture : it enhances it. It reveals the gloom that is the keynote of the picture :

> As by an uncertain moonray secretly illumin'd
> One goeth in the forest, when heav'n is gloomily clouded,
> And black night hath robb'd the colours and beauty from all things.[1]

So in one of Rembrandt's portrait-groups, *The Syndics of the Cloth Hall,* we see a number of grave merchants seated round a table. Everything is in keeping with the general impression of dignity and responsibility, from the men's sober garments to the heavy lines of the panelling that serves as a background. On the table at which the merchants are seated is a red cloth disguised for the most

[1] R. Bridges, *Ibant Obscuri.*

part by the prevailing gloom, but through a window the light shines upon a corner, making it glow with a warmth that is marvellous. Cover up that patch of canvas and the picture becomes a lifeless thing. The red is the essential note of contrast, and it enhances the cold severity of the whole composition. If, however, the artist in his anxiety to secure an effective contrast had emphasized that note more strongly he would have failed because he would have destroyed the unity of his picture. If we turn to another of Rembrandt's pictures, the one which is usually called *The Night Watch*, we have a scene bristling with arms. There is all the orderly confusion inevitably associated with the assembling of a company of soldiers. But in the midst, inexplicably it would seem, is a little golden-haired girl. Some critics have been greatly concerned over her presence amid such alien surroundings, but Rembrandt knew his business. Her radiance gives a depth to the enveloping gloom, and her innocence intensifies the sternness of the warlike preparations that are afoot. We see this contrasting note in all great pictures, whether it is a red sail upon a sunlit sea or a strip of black velvet at a girl's throat.

Literature abounds in similar examples. As we have been considering a painter's use of contrasting colours, we cannot do better than note George Meredith's remarkable ' yellow ' stanza from *Love in the Valley* :

Yellow with birdfoot-trefoil are the grass-glades ;
Yellow with cinquefoil of the dew-gray leaf ;
Yellow with stonecrop ; the moss-mounds are yellow ;
Blue-necked the wheat sways, yellowing to the sheaf.
Green-yellow bursts from the copse the laughing yaffle ;
Sharp as a sickle is the edge of shade and shine :
Earth in her heart laughs looking at the heavens,
Thinking of the harvest : I look and think of mine.

Were the yellow unrelieved the repetition would be wearisome and the artistic effect *nil*; but the touches of blue and grey give us the glow of midsummer.

Or we may take Charles Reade's description of Gerard's escape from the mill in *The Cloister and the Hearth*. It is a fearful picture of villainy and despair, and a casual reader might think that to be all. But there are two contrasting touches that reveal the artist, and make the horrible more horrible. When Gerard, full of foreboding, looked out of the mill window he saw the moon lighting up the trees so that they " seemed silver filagree made by angel craftsmen." Later, in that terrible moment when the mill caught fire and the crippled man hobbled away from the scene of desolation, the trees in the light of that huge torch " were now all like pyramids of golden filagree, and lace, cobweb fine, in the red firelight. Oh, most beautiful!" That note of beauty in the midst of unspeakable horror and ugliness makes the picture.

Then we may pass to Stevenson's poem *Christmas at Sea*, full of the delight of going forth in a tight little ship to do battle with the storm. The air was salt, and the vessel's nose, " pointing handsome out to sea," seemed to scent adventure and free roving on the main; but (and here is the inevitable note of contrast)

> All that I could think of in the darkness and the cold,
> Was just that I was leaving home and my folks were growing old.

Or we may note the superb picture of evening that Milton draws in the fourth book of *Paradise Lost*:

> Now came still Ev'ning on, and Twilight gray
> Had in her sober liv'ry all things clad;
> Silence accompanied, for beast and bird,
> They to their grassy couch, these to their nests
> Were slunk.

So far the silence is unbroken, and had the poet stopped there the result would have been tame and ineffective. Something is necessary to make us *hear* the silence, so Milton proceeds :

> all but the wakeful nightingale—
> She all night long her amorous descant sung ;
> Silence was pleased.

That final touch is magical.

These are but touches ; a flick from a deft brush and a marvel is wrought. Sometimes, however, contrast in bulk is necessary to produce the required effect. Of this we have an instance in Andrew Marvell's lines *To his Coy Mistress*, where he reproaches the lady with her unreasonable reluctance to wed him. Had Time no limits, he says, he would be well content to wait her pleasure, and after a stanza in which he expounds his " vegetable love " that, under such conditions,

> should grow
> Vaster than empires, and more slow,

he writes another, contrasting this slow, luxurious ideal with the painful and intrusive reality, where

> at my back I always hear
> Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near.

But he is careful not to make Byron's mistake, and there is an artistic resolution of the contrast in the final injunction to his mistress to make haste. Time is short, so

> Let us roll all our strength and all
> Our sweetness up into one ball.

A similar structure will be seen in this beautiful poem on death from Ecclesiasticus :

O Death,
How bitter is the remembrance of thee
To a man that is at peace in his possessions,
Unto the man that hath nothing to distract him,
And hath prosperity in all things,
And that still hath strength to receive meat!

O Death,
Acceptable is thy sentence
Unto a man that is needy, and that faileth in strength,
That is in extreme old age,
And is distracted about all things,
And is perverse, and hath lost patience!

Fear not the sentence of Death;
Remember them that have been before thee,
And that come after.
This is the sentence from the Lord over all flesh:
And why dost thou refuse,
When it is the good pleasure of the Most High?
Whether it be ten, or a hundred,
Or a thousand years,
There is no inquisition of life in the grave.[1]

An even more powerful use of extended contrast is seen in the sublime piece of rhetoric in Deuteronomy xxviii—the Blessing and the Curse. "These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people . . . and these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse." Here the speaker is purposely making the contrast as startling as possible: there is no need to point the moral. He masses his effects with marvellous skill, and the main contrast is enforced by a number of minor contrasts in the oration.

At the opposite pole from such lengthy contrasts we have the condensed form generally known as antithesis, as where Ruskin speaks of "the noble unsightliness" of the old tower of Calais church, or Macaulay says of the

[1] Ecclus. xli, 1–5; Moulton, *Modern Reader's Bible*.

Puritans that, "if they were unacquainted with the works of philosophers and poets, they were deeply read in the oracles of God." There is a striking example at the end of Gibbon's description of the fall of Palmyra :

> The seat of commerce, of arts, and of Zenobia, gradually sunk into an obscure town, a trifling fortress, and at length a miserable village. The present citizens of Palmyra, consisting of thirty or forty families, have erected their mud cottages within the spacious court of a magnificent temple.[1]

This, in a most powerful way, reinforces the unity of the whole work, for the wretched huts that represent modern Palmyra typify the inglorious ruins of a much greater edifice—the Roman Empire.

The employment of contrast produces a visible effect so readily that an unskilful writer is tempted to resort to it too often. Its arbitrary use is disastrous, like that of an edged tool, but in the hands of genius it can be made to convey the subtlest effects and the most delicate irony. It is the crested lark, for example, who comments upon the Sub-Prefect's baldness in Daudet's *Prose Ballads*. Contrast is not a device imposed upon artistic effort : it is implicit in all nature, and it is for the artist to unfold it as Wordsworth does when he speaks of the skylark's "nest upon the dewy ground" contrasted with "the privacy of glorious light" which it enjoys in the heavens, or as Shelley does when he says :

> Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

[1] *Decline and Fall*, ch. xi.

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

Note the character-contrast, accentuated by a striking similarity in appearance, between Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Other character-contrasts may be seen in the Prince and Hotspur in 1 *Henry IV*; Cœur-de-Lion and the Saracen in *The Talisman*; Pippa and the other characters in *Pippa Passes*. Charles Reade's *Cloister and the Hearth* is full of the most effective contrasting touches. Two have been mentioned in the text: another that deserves to be specified is that in chapter xxxiii, where the fight in the inn is described. The body of the murdered man is propped up in the chair, and a moonbeam creeping in at the window intensifies the ghastliness of the sight. Then there is the massed contrast between North and South in *The Stones of Venice* (vol. ii, ch. vi, par. 8); and the description of Turner's *Slave Ship* in the first volume of *Modern Painters* (Sect. V, ch. iii, par. 39). In *Romola* we have the silence of Savonarola effectively following the torrent of mingled denunciation and entreaty that composed his sermon (ch. xxiv), and in Shelley's *Ozymandias* the shattered statue and the "lone and level sands" contrasting with the proud boast of the "king of kings." The "Choric Song" in Tennyson's *Lotos-Eaters* presents the contrast between the toilsome labour at the oar and the languorous restfulness of the island "In which it seemed always afternoon." In his *Essay on Milton* Macaulay uses the comparative method by drawing an extended contrast between *Paradise Lost* and *The Divine Comedy*. The Bible affords many fine examples of contrast; those in Psalms iii, cii, and cxxxvii may be cited.

EXERCISES

1. Discuss the unity of the following works: Newman's *Apologia*, Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *The Faerie Queene*, and *Hamlet*.

2. Give in a sentence your main impression of the last book that you read.

3. Willmott says that "a classification of authors to suit all weathers might be amusing." Try to prescribe a suitable book for each of these occasions: (*a*) a long railway journey; (*b*) a journey in a London 'tube'; (*c*) convalescence; (*d*) reading in bed.

4. Give an example from your own reading of (*a*) a powerful contrast that serves to accentuate the unity of the book or passage; (*b*) a contrast that is too startling to be effective, and destroys unity.

5. Comment upon the effectiveness of the contrast in the following stanza:

> Again! again! again!
> And the havoc did not slack,
> Till a feeble cheer the Dane
> To our cheering sent us back;—
> Their shots along the deep slowly boom:—
> Then ceased—and all is wail,
> As they strike the shatter'd sail;
> Or in conflagration pale,
> Light the gloom.
>
> T. Campbell

CHAPTER III

RHYTHM

Rhythm is not meant to be explained, but only to be understood. F. AND E. BRETT YOUNG

AS life expresses itself in movement, so literature, which is an expression of life at its highest, is based upon movement. Now all natural movement tends to become regular. It is not haphazard, but obeys certain fixed laws. There is normally a period of action followed by a period of rest; a stress and then a pause. This regular movement we call rhythm. Breathing, walking, swimming are all rhythmical if done naturally. Only in moments of great emotion or abnormal excitement is the rhythm disturbed, and then not for long. In self-defence the body seeks to restore the usual order, otherwise exhaustion would follow. We may, it is true, lengthen the period of stress to some extent, but then we have also to lengthen the period of rest correspondingly, and the net result is to make the movement slower. On the other hand, we may shorten the period of stress and also the necessary rest, and then we shall quicken the movement. In rowing a boat, for instance, we may elect for "a long pull and a strong pull," or we may let our strokes come in rapid succession. The muscles, however, will resent too many changes from one mode to the other.

Our speech is regulated in the same way. The construction of the throat forces us to accent one syllable

in a word, *e.g.*, ' remárkable.' It is certainly possible to say ' re-mark-a-ble,' stressing all the syllables equally, but only by a distinct effort that could not be sustained, and such a pronunciation is as unnatural as it is unpleasant.

Just as the throat imposes accent upon us, so the lungs dictate a pause at the end of every group of words. A clumsy speaker will make this dictation very obvious by allowing the pause to cut clean across the meaning of his words. He pauses, that is to say, when he is out of breath, and this will often happen at times most inconvenient for the sense of his utterance. Not so with one whose speech is beautiful. He wrests this beauty from stern necessity by controlling his breath on the one hand, and the length of his phrases on the other, so that, instead of destroying his meaning, the pauses are made to enhance it. We shall see that this harmony of spirit and matter is at the root of all that is beautiful in literature or in art.

The rhythm of speech, then, is not absolutely regular, but can be made wonderfully adaptable. Stresses and pauses recur, it is true, but more or less freely, and we cannot predict the time of their recurrence with any certainty. When this ordinary speech is committed to writing we have prose, a suitable expression of the mind when free from any special feeling or emotion. But when the emotion deepens, or passion is aroused, the speech assumes a more positive rhythm. The accents become more strongly marked; the phrases more abrupt; and the pauses of necessity more frequent. In a plain, matter-of-fact statement the rhythm is relatively unimportant, as, for example, in the opening sentence of *Guy Mannering*:

> It was in the beginning of the month of November, 17—, when a young English gentleman, who had just left the University of Oxford, made use of the liberty afforded him, to visit some parts of the north of England ; and curiosity extended his tour into the adjacent frontier of the sister country.

The stresses here are by no means strongly marked, yet no one could deny rhythm even to this sentence. There is movement in it, although it is suitably slow and deliberate. The writer is biding his time, and when, in the eighth chapter, we come to the mighty curse that Meg Merrilies hurled at the hapless Ellangowan, we see how Scott could quicken his movement and increase his force tremendously when occasion warranted it :

> Ride your ways, Laird of Ellangowan—ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram !—This day have ye quenched seven smoking hearths—see if the fire in your ain parlour burn the blither for that. Ye have riven the thack off seven cottar houses—look if your ain roof-tree stand the faster.—Ye may stable your stirks in the shealings at Derncleugh—see that the hare does not couch on the hearthstane at Ellangowan.—Ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram—what do ye glower after our folk for ?—There's thirty hearts there, that wad hae wanted bread ere ye had wanted sunkets, and spent their life-blood ere ye had scratched your finger. Yes—there's thirty yonder, from the auld wife of an hundred to the babe that was born last week, that ye have turned out o' their bits o' bields, to sleep with the tod and the black-cock in the muirs !—Ride your ways, Ellangowan.—Our bairns are hinging at our weary backs—look that your braw cradle at hame be the fairer spread up—not that I am wishing ill to little Harry, or to the babe that's yet to be born—God forbid—and make them kind to the poor, and better folk than their father ! And now, ride e'en your ways ; for these are the last words ye'll ever hear Meg Merrilies speak, and this is the last reise that I'll ever cut in the bonny woods of Ellangowan.

Here everyday, commonplace speech is exalted into rhetoric—the borderland between prose and verse. Such a passage shows the limit of what can be accomlished in prose-rhythm, and only a master-hand could achieve so much.

Deep feeling, indeed, needs a very strong curb in order that it may be adequately expressed, otherwise it will grow incoherent. The stresses, under such circumstances, tend to multiply so that every syllable is hammered out, and too much force is as disastrous for the general effect as too little. The discipline imposed by the verse-forms is invaluable here. The rhythm becomes measured : the recurrence of the stresses regular. A clear apprehension of this will help us to avoid a radical error in our view of poetry. Verse-rhythm is not an artificial measure imposed upon the ordinary expression of a thought so as to produce a pretty effect or a pleasing sound, but a natural mode that has been evolved out of necessity.

When in early days the members of a community wished to celebrate some fortunate happening, such as a great victory over their foes, they did so, not by speech merely, but also by song and dance. Such of these ' ballad-dances ' as remain to us form our earliest literature. When the might of Egypt was overthrown, and " the horses of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought again the waters of the sea upon them . . . Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand ; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." And the magnificent pæan which she sang we may still read.

In this bit of elemental literature we may see the three

constituents speech, song, and gesture all represented. As Sir Henry Newbolt says, " The oldest ballads were literally *ballata*, that is, dances : the narrative was sung by the minstrel, and the refrains were sung with actions by the dancers." He says further, " The rhythmic instinct of life begot the movement of dancing : dancing was accompanied and regulated by the beating of the measure in monotone : and this drum-rhythm was then impressed upon language, which became thereby more beautiful, more emotional, and more memorable." So we have achieved our verse-rhythm, which has lasted, and will last, because there comes a point in the experience of every man when the ordinary speech-rhythm is totally inadequate as a means of expression. When feelings run high, and the very depths of the spirit are stirred, then with the loose rhythm of prose as his sole instrument a man splutters and falters ineffectually until all power of utterance goes. Only by the sterner discipline of verse can he retain coherence. Examples of exalted prose-rhetoric, such as Meg Merrilies' denunciation just quoted, or the praise of famous men in Ecclesiasticus, are comparatively so rare as to leave the truth of this statement undisturbed.

Passing then to the consideration of metre or measured rhythm, we see that the basic principle is the regular recurrence of the stress. The rhythm is restrained, and this restraint gives the emotion which it expresses a lofty dignity otherwise unattainable. Not only so, but the ear soon learns to anticipate the stress, and receives pleasure from the fulfilment of expectation. The simplest form of verse-rhythm is seen where we have a stressed syllable followed by one that is unstressed, or *vice versa*. If there is an initial stress, as in the word ' robber,' we get

a trochaic line: if the stress is terminal, as in 'attempt,' the line is iambic.

Of how humdrum and unspeakably tedious these measures can become without inspiration we have too many examples. But it is one of the chief delights in reading poetry to note how the master-craftsmen have manipulated these same conventional measures to achieve precisely the result they wanted. A sense of difficulty, whether in the idea or in its expression, seems to find the terminal measure its fittest vehicle.

Unéasy líes the héad that wéars a crówn.

I énd as Í begán,
I thínk as fírst I thóught;
Woe worth the world if Man
Only of dust is wrought.

In the first example the difficulties are felt to be insuperable; in the second they have been triumphantly surmounted, but in each case we are made conscious of effort and a great struggle. The strong accent of the initial measure, however, rapped out without preliminary warnings, strikes a note of positive assurance.[1] No difficulties are seen in the way.

Wélcome, wíld North-éaster!
Sháme it ís to sée
Odes to every zephyr;
Ne'er a verse to thee.

Gód for King Chárles! Pým and such cárles
To the devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!

It is the declaration of a strong faith that knows nothing of doubt. It is interesting, from this point of view, to

[1] Yet Shelley, as Lafcadio Hearn points out, could wring an expression of regret even out of the trochaic measure. See the exquisite song beginning: "Rarely, rarely, comest thou, Spirit of Delight."

take Wordsworth's *To a Skylark*, and compare the rhythm of

> Ethereal minstrel ! pilgrim of the sky !
> Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound ?

with that of Shelley's triumphant lines on the same subject :

> Hail to thee, blithe Spirit !
> Bird thou never wert.

The comparison will incidentally give us the key to temperamental differences between the two poets.

It will be noticed that in the lines from Browning quoted above, beginning "Gód for King Chárles!" the stress is immediately followed by two unstressed syllables. This triple measure gives the effect of great speed ; the grouping of the stresses may vary, as in ' satisfy,' ' important,' and ' promenade,' but in any case a ' galloping ' rhythm is the result :

> I róde through the Búsh in the búrning nóon
> Over the hills to my bride.

Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* will furnish abundant examples of changes in rhythm to suit the sense, and illustrates further what has been said already concerning the various measures. The first line,

> The wáy was lóng, the wínd was cóld,

suggests labour and difficulty, very different from the swing of

> Níne-and-twénty knights of fáme
> Hung their shields in Branksome Hall.

Then we pass to the breathless hurry of

> " O swíftly can spéed my dápple-gray stéed,
> Which drinks of the Teviot clear " ;

and the dour fearlessness of Deloraine's assertion :

> " Pénance, fáther, wíll I nóne ;
> Prayer know I hardly one " ;

and then the lines quicken :

> " For máss or práyer can I rárely tárry
> Save to patter an Ave Mary,
> When I ride on a Border foray."

And so we might follow the poem through all its rhythmic changes until we reached its conclusion in the awe-inspiring lines of the " Hymn for the Dead " :

> That day of wrath, that dreadful day,
> When heaven and earth shall pass away,
> What power shall be the sinner's stay ?
> How shall he meet that dreadful day ?

Here the difference between what are normally strong and weak stresses is so small as to be barely noticeable, giving the effect of evenness, impressiveness, and solemnity.

Such is the variety of rhythm that can be found in a single poem. When, however, we are set at large in the whole realm of English poetry we have a range that is as delightful as it is bewildering. We can feel the roll of the sea in Tennyson's

> We have had enough of action, and of motion we,
> Roll'd to starboard, roll'd to larboard, when the surge was seething free,
> Where the wallowing monster spouted his foam-fountains in the sea,

or listen to Stevenson recapturing the beat of a train as it goes

> Faster than fairies, faster than witches,
> Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches,

or hear the grind of the familiar barrel-organ in Alfred Noyes'

> Go down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time ;
> Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London !).

From that we may pass to the calm glide of a Venetian gondola in Browning's lines :

> Past we glide, and past, and past !
> Why's the Pucci Palace flaring
> Like a beacon to the blast ?
> Guests by hundreds—not one caring
> If the dear host's neck were wried :
> Past we glide !

or watch the haphazard hurry-scurry of snowflakes in Robert Bridges'

> When men were all asleep the snow came flying,
> In large white flakes falling on the city brown,
> Stealthily and perpetually settling and loosely lying,
> Hushing the latest traffic of the drowsy town ;

or hear the dropping fir-cones in Meredith's

> Overhead, overhead
> Rushes life in a race,
> As the clouds the clouds chase ;
> And we go,
> And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
> Even we,
> Even so.

And so we might go on to consider more of the countless effects which, as we said, a poet can obtain by skilful manipulation of the normal measures. Possibly the word ' manipulation ' will give a wrong impression, and it would be better to say that the great poets have been so much at one with their subjects that the right rhythm

has come to them inevitably. To us the conjunction of matter and measure must ever seem something of a miracle ; for them there was no other way. But we need to bear in mind that such rhythms as those we have been studying are effective only when they are comparatively rare. Our sense of appreciation is easily dulled by familiarity. Most probably the one man on earth who would utterly fail to appraise Browning's *In a Gondola* at its true value is the Venetian gondolier. He knows the rhythm too well to wonder at it—too well perhaps even to recognize it. The extraordinary for him has become ordinary, and so has lost its significance. For most of us, happily, the commonplace still makes up the bulk of existence, and poetry, if it is to keep in touch with everyday life, must be made up mainly of the normal rhythm, by which we breathe and walk.

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

There is a clear and illuminating account of rhythm in Sir Henry Newbolt's *New Study of English Poetry*, in which he does full justice to the freer rhythmic system introduced by Coleridge in *Christabel* and continued with such success by Robert Bridges. F. and E. Brett Young's *Robert Bridges : A Critical Study* may also be consulted on this point. Raymond's *Poetry as a Representative Art* and Lamborn's *Rudiments of Criticism* are both extremely useful. For a good example of how not to do it read Mark Twain's amusing account of a translation of *The Lorelei* in *A Tramp Abroad* (ch. xvi). The following examples of special rhythmical effects in verse may be noted in addition to those quoted in the text. The list could be extended indefinitely, and the

student will take pleasure in making additions from his own reading.

Height and serenity : *The Robin* (Thomas Hardy).
The booming of great guns : *Sound of Guns at Sea* (Henry Newbolt).
The wind : *Windy Nights* (R. L. Stevenson).
The windings of a maze : *The Rash Bride* (Thomas Hardy).
The stately rhythm of an old dance : *Gavotte* (Henry Newbolt).
The thrush's song : *The Throstle* (Tennyson).
The rhythm of oars : *Frater Ave atque Vale* (Tennyson).
The roll of the sea : *Hymn to the Sea* (Watson).
The swallow's flight : *Itylus* (Swinburne).

For prose-rhythm at its best read R. L. Stevenson, Macaulay, Hazlitt, and De Quincey. The account of Monmouth's burial in the Tower (Macaulay's *History*, ch. v) is very fine. An additional example of Scott's rhetoric will be found in Ulrica's denunciation of Front-de-Bœuf (*Ivanhoe*, ch. xxx). Prose-rhythm is ably treated in George Wyndham's *Essays in Romantic Literature*. The importance of rhythm in reading aloud is well put in Tomkinson's *Teaching of English*, and in Hardress O'Grady's *Reading Aloud*.

EXERCISES

1. Rhythm gives us " the pleasure of having a certain expectation satisfied though it is never satiated." Discuss this statement and give examples.
2. Comment upon the rhythmic effects in the following :

(*a*) When that I was and a little tiny boy,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain ;
A foolish thing was but a toy,
For the rain it raineth every day.

SHAKESPEARE

(*b*) Not a word to each other : we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place.

ROBERT BROWNING

(*c*) Row till the land dip 'neath
The sea from view.
Row till a land peep up,
A home for you.
T. Sturge Moore

(*d*) To picture out the quaint and curious bending
Of the fresh woodland alley never-ending.
Keats

(*e*) Close Echo hears the woodman's axe,
To double on it, as in glee,
With clap of hands, and little lacks
Of meaning in her repartee.
For all shall fall,
As one has done,
The tree of me,
Of thee the tree.
Meredith

3. Search for examples of rhythm in nature other than those quoted in the text ; give also examples of what has been termed " the rhythmic instinct," whereby man is rhythmical in his best work.

4. Examine the arrangement of stresses in the following passages, and show how it differs from the more rigid and conventional arrangements :

(*a*) Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,
That fearest nor sea rising, nor sky clouding,
Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest ?
Robert Bridges

(*b*) Is the night chilly and dark ?
The night is chilly, but not dark.
The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky.
Coleridge

CHAPTER IV

CHANGE AND RECURRENCE

> Just as the lily is repeated in the lake, or the eyes of Amaryllis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of these forms, and sounds, and colours, and odours and sentiments, a duplicate source of delight.
>
> EDGAR ALLAN POE

BOTH the young child and the primitive savage take unbounded delight in hearing the same sound over and over again. They revel in a familiar cadence. For the hundredth time of telling the fairy-tale secures rapturous listeners, though it is known thoroughly by heart; and the minstrels with their well-worn stories of knight-errantry and derring-do never lacked an audience. Half the charm of these tales, both new and old, lies in their recurring and familiar phrases. In the story of *The Old Woman and her Pig*, for instance, there comes at intervals the pleasing refrain, "Piggy won't get over the stile, and I shan't get home to-night." The child listens for its recurrence as we listen for the neighbouring chimes, and would be quick to resent any disposition on the part of a matter-of-fact narrator to "cut the cackle and come to the 'osses." In all old tales there is this element of repetition. In that wonderfully significant parable of the trees, for example, which Jotham told the men of Shechem each tree in turn as it is given the invitation, "Come thou, and reign over us," replies, "Shall I leave my fatness [or whatever its

particular virtue may be] and go to wave to and fro over the trees ? " This formula is repeated until we come to the ignoble bramble, which, having no particular virtue to boast of, accepts joyfully. Here, as always, change and recurrence go hand in hand. There is just enough of the new to spice the repetition, the sound of which is friendly and familiar and makes us feel at home.

This primitive delight in repetition, often so inexplicable to those sophisticated elders upon whom " shades of the prison-house " have closed desperately, gives yet another key to literary appreciation. Our early English poets loved to string together words beginning with the same sound—a device that we call ' head-rime ' or ' alliteration.' It was a new game then, and they exulted in it as a child revels in sorting out a new box of bricks. Indeed, poets in later times have found it dangerously tempting. Shakespeare poked fun at its extravagant use when he made the pedant Holofernes begin his " extemporal epitaph " thus :

> The preyful princess pierc'd and prick'd a pretty pleasing pricket ;
> Some say a sore ; but not a sore, till now made sore with shooting.

But though the poet is no longer dependent upon alliteration to bind his verse together he still has it for occasional use, and how effective it can be made the following examples will show :

> Magdalen's tall tower tipped with tremulous gold
> Marks the long High Street of the little town.
>
> OSCAR WILDE

> A long, lonely, leaden mere.
>
> W. E. HENLEY

Flaming, flaring, fuming,
Cracking, crackling, creeping,
Hissing and consuming:
Mighty is the fire.

ROBERT BRIDGES

Now my brothers call from the bay,
Now the great winds shorewards blow,
Now the salt tides seawards flow,
Now the wild white horses play,
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

But the old poets soon got beyond the mere sorting out of words beginning with the same sound, and began to use the subtler device of placing in close proximity words with the same vowel sound. This we call 'assonance,' and our modern poetry owes much of its sweetest music to this source. Swinburne was very fond of it, as we may see from the following stanza from the "Prelude" to *Songs before Sunrise*:

A little time that we may fill
Or with such good works or such ill
As loose the bonds or make them strong
Wherein all manhood suffers wrong.
By rose-hung river and light-foot rill
There are those who rest not; who think long
Till they discern as from a hill,
At the sun's hour of morning song,
Known of souls only, and those souls free,
The sacred spaces of the sea.

It is not so obvious as head-rime, but the ear soon learns to catch the recurring vowels in *l*ittle, f*i*ll, *i*ll; b*o*nds, str*o*ng, wr*o*ng; r*i*ver, r*i*ll, th*i*nk, d*i*scern, h*i*ll; kn*o*wn, s*o*uls, *o*nly, th*o*se; s*a*cred, sp*a*ces. Buchanan too uses assonance effectively to describe Drowsietown in *White Rose and Red*:

Thro' the fields with sleepy gleam,
Drowsy, drowsy steals the stream,
Touching with its azure arms
Upland fields and peaceful farms,
Gliding with a twilight tide
Where the dark elms shade its side ;
Twining, pausing sweet and bright
Where the lilies sail so white ;
Winding in its sedgy hair
Meadow-sweet and iris fair ;
Humming as it hies along
Monotones of sleepy song ;
Deep and dimpled, bright nut-brown,
Flowing into Drowsietown.

The soothing monotony of the vowel-music here is most appropriate to the subject. Leigh Hunt makes some wise comments upon this question of vowel-repetition in his *Autobiography*. On one occasion " Wordsworth had found fault with the repetition of the concluding sound of the participles in Shakespeare's line about bees :

The singing masons building roofs of gold.

This was, he said, a line which Milton would never have written. Keats thought, on the other hand, that the repetition was in harmony with the continued note of the singers, and that Shakespeare's negligence (if negligence it was) had instinctively felt the thing in the best manner. The assertion about Milton is startling, considering the tendency of that great poet to subject his nature to art ; yet I have dipped while writing this, into *Paradise Lost*, and at the second chance have lit upon the following :

The gray
Dawn, and the Pleiades before him danced ;
Shedding sweet influence. Less bright the moon,
But opposite, *in levelled west, was set*
His mirror, with full force borrowing her light.

The repetition of the *c* in the fourth line is an extreme case in point, being monotonous in order to express oneness and evenness."

Besides matching consonants and vowels for the sake of effect, the early poets tried linking together as many ways of saying the same thing as their ingenuity could devise. This ' parallelism ' is a marked feature of old Hebrew poetry, as may be seen in our Book of Psalms :

> Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God :
> Set me on high from them that rise up against me.
> Deliver me from the workers of iniquity,
> And save me from the bloodthirsty men.[1]

Here again we have change linked with recurrence : the expression varies, but the idea is the same throughout. In Moulton's *Modern Reader's Bible* the poetical books are so arranged that the full beauty and significance of this parallelism is made clear.

In Western lands the parallelism took a different form. In an early poem like *Beowulf* the writer uses very many terms to express the same thing, but each new term introduces a new shade of meaning. As Professor Long says, " There are fifteen names for the sea, from the *holm*, that is, the horizon sea, the ' upmounding,' to the *brim*, which is the ocean flinging its welter of sand and creamy foam upon the beach at your feet. And the figures used to describe or glorify it—' the swan road,' ' the whale path,' ' the heaving battle plain '—are almost as numerous." But this parallelism of content began to give way to a parallelism of form. The poet made his lines equal in length, or else varied the line-length according to a prearranged pattern. To the Hebrew poet,

[1] Psalm lix ; Moulton, *Modern Reader's Bible.*

however, this was a matter of indifference. He was careful to put like ideas together: the length of line required for their expression was left to take care of itself. So when Job, groaning heavily under his affliction, cursed his day, he said:

> Let that day be darkness;
> Let not God regard it from above,
> Neither let the light shine upon it.
> Let darkness and the shadow of death claim it for
> their own;
> Let a cloud dwell upon it;
> Let all that maketh black the day terrify it!

There is here no metre as we understand it. The thought is measured, but not the line. The difference may be seen clearly by contrasting one of the metrical versions of the Psalms with the Authorized Version. We may take part of Psalm lxxxiv as an example:

> How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!
> My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord;
> My heart and flesh cry out unto the living God.

If we turn to Tate and Brady's metrical version of the same passage, we shall see at a glance the difference between the parallelism of content of the Hebrew poet and the parallelism of form of English poetry:

> O God of Hosts, the mighty Lord,
> How lovely is the place,
> Where Thou, enthroned in glory, shew'st
> The brightness of Thy face.
>
> My longing soul faints with desire
> To view thy blest abode;
> My panting heart and flesh cry out
> For Thee, the living God.

No one would dream of submitting those familiar stanzas as representative of English poetry, but they will serve well enough to illustrate the argument that our poets made line-length the prime consideration, and fitted in the ideas according to the prearranged plan. They measured their lines, and, to aid in the task of memorizing at a time when poetry had of necessity to be learnt by heart, the device of 'end-rime' was adopted. These poets played with end-rimes as their predecessors had played with the head-rime that had now become merely incidental, and not at all essential to the fabric of the verse. At first the simple form of the riming couplet was used. Here the lines were evenly matched in length, and the final sound of the second line recalled that of the first. The poetry of Pope will afford as many examples of this as may be desired :

We think our fathers fools, so wise we grow ;	*a*
Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so.	*a*

Then the rimes were made alternate :

To drive the deer with hound and horn	*a*
Earl Percy took his way ;	*b*
The child may rue that is unborn	*a*
The hunting of that day.	*b*

And after that all manner of more or less intricate patterns were devised by innovators. We may see a great poet trying his prentice hand at all kinds of interlacing rimes if we turn to Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar.* Here is one stanza :

Bring hither the pink and purple columbine,	*a*
With gelliflowers,	*b*
Bring coronations, and sops in wine,	*a*
Worn of paramours :	*b*

Strow me the ground with daffadowndillies, *c*
And cowslips, and kingcups, and loved lillies : *c*
The pretty paunce, *d*
And the chevisaunce, *d*
Shall match the fair flower delice. *c*

As Edward Kirke says in the Epistle with which he introduces this poem : " Walking in the sun . . . yet needs he must be sunburnt ; and having the sound of those ancient poets still ringing in his ears, he must needs, in singing, hit out some of their tunes." So, indeed, Spenser tried one tune after another until he had fashioned for himself the stanza of the *Faerie Queene*, with which his name will ever be associated.

In any rime-pattern it is the coupling of change with recurrence which gives pleasure to the reader. The ear anticipates the familiar sound, and takes an even greater delight in it when it comes if one or two alien sounds have intervened. The poet's skill consists in knowing just how long he can defer satisfying that expectation without wearying the reader. He has also to avoid, on the one hand, the evil of making his rimes smell of the lamp ; and, on the other, of letting them run away with him in a careless, haphazard fashion. Tennyson, as Watts-Dunton pointed out, was apt to be too rigorous in his selection of rimes, so that his verse sometimes lacks inspiration. Keats and Swinburne, on the contrary, did not always scrutinize their rimes with sufficient care, so that we get examples of this kind :

The wanderer
Holding his forehead to keep off the burr
Of smothering fancies.

Scott too was not innocent in this matter, as we may see from this ugly rime :

"Charge, Chester, charge! On, Stanley, on!"
Were the last words of Marmion.

Masculine rimes, like 'ground' and 'round,' are better for general use than feminine rimes, such as 'seething' and 'breathing'; while polysyllabic rimes are used as a rule only to give a humorous or bizarre effect to the verse. Robert Browning revelled in all manner of mischievous tricks in rime. To look for the most far-fetched specimen that his poetry affords is not a bad occupation for a rainy afternoon. Here is a good example to begin with:

While treading down rose and ranunculus,
You *Tommy-make-room-for-your-uncle* us!

In parodies and humorous verse such rimes form an essential part of the versifier's stock-in-trade. So Barham, in the *Ingoldsby Legends*, gives us:

So down on your marrow-bones, Jew, and ask mercy!
Defendant and Plaintiff are now *wisy wersy*,

and Lewis Carroll, in *Alice in Wonderland*, makes the Mock Turtle sing:

Who would not give all else for two p
ennyworth only of beautiful Soup.

With these gems we may class the following from Lowell's *Biglow Papers*:

But John P.
Robinson he
Sez this kind o' thing's an exploded idee,

and this from the Sentry's song in Sir W. S. Gilbert's *Iolanthe*:

When in that house M.P.'s divide,
If they've a brain and cerebellum, too,
They've got to leave that brain outside,
And vote just as their leaders tell 'em to.

But end-rime is only one of many modes of recurrence. The poet who, greatly daring, discards the aid of rime and essays blank verse seeks for some other form of repetition to take its place. He may hark back upon alliteration. He may, like Collins in his *Ode to Evening*, resort to assonance. He will almost certainly adopt a more or less rigid parallelism of line. And very probably he will use 'consonance,' the most subtle and delicate of all forms of repetition. Let us look at a passage from *Paradise Lost*:

*H*ail, *h*oly *L*igh*t*, offspri*n*g of *H*eav'*n* firs*t*-bor*n* !
Or of th' E*t*er*n*al coe*t*er*n*al bea*m*
*M*ay I express Thee u*n*bla*m*ed ? si*n*ce God is *l*igh*t*,
A*n*d *n*ever bu*t* in u*n*approachèd *L*igh*t*
Dwe*l**t* fro*m* e*t*er*n*i*t*y—dwe*l**t* the*n* i*n* Thee,
Brigh*t* effl*u*e*n*ce of brigh*t* esse*n*ce i*n*crea*t*e !

The alliteration in the first line will be apparent to the dullest ear, but an attentive reader will also catch the recurring *l*, now at the end of a word, then in the middle, and again at the beginning. While this sound is yet chiming in his ear he becomes aware that a fresh set of repetitions has started: the *t*'s and the *n*'s interlace, and soon the *m*'s join them. When the changes have been rung on these consonants for a little, the familiar sound of the *l* is heard once more, and then *t*, *m*, and *n* again take up the burden. This is verbal harmony of the highest and sweetest kind. The same sounds recur not only at the beginning of words, as in alliteration, but wherever the stress may be placed, giving at once unity

and delightful music to the lines. This is consonance, and the reader will find in the work of Milton, Shelley, Tennyson, and Francis Thompson a happy hunting-ground for further examples.

In the passage that I have just quoted the repetition of the words ' bright ' and ' light ' will be noticed also. This is not accidental, for these are key-words which bind the work into a whole and enforce the main impression the writer wishes to leave with the reader. The poets often linger over a beautiful and significant word or phrase as if loth to leave it. So Francis Thompson in the line

> Sweet with wild wings that pass, that pass away,

makes it seem as if he would hinder the passing a little by dwelling upon it, and Matthew Arnold, when he makes the bereaved Merman say,

> Come away, away, children.
> Come, children, come down,

voices a tender regret that broods lovingly over the cause of its sorrows. This note of sweet pathos is often associated with the recurrence of a haunting word or phrase. It is like opening a packet of old letters from one who has passed beyond, and conning once again the familiar sentiments in the familiar handwriting. Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven* affords a well-known instance of this haunting repetition, giving a hint of the irrevocable and of a sadness that can never find adequate relief, but the same poet's *Ulalume* gives a yet more pathetic melody. This shadowy tale of " the dim lake of Auber " and the " ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir " is a remarkable expression of dreary hopelessness. Rupert Brooke is

another poet who loved to dwell upon a significant phrase :

> And a long watch you would keep ;
> And I should sleep, and I should sleep.

From such repetitions to the standardized repeat in the form of ' refrain ' or ' chorus ' is but a short step, and the refrain serves a similar purpose in driving home the point of the story, as well as in binding the several stanzas into a whole poem. We may see this equally well illustrated in one of Robert Browning's *Cavalier Tunes*, with its suggestion of extreme haste and fiery impetuosity :

> Boot, saddle, to horse, and away ;

or in Spenser's *Prothalamion* :

> Sweet Thames ! run softly, till I end my song,

quaintly signifying leisure and sweet content. Then, too, there is that most impressive refrain in the " Doom of the North " (Isaiah ix, 8, to x, 4).[1] Successive misdeeds are recounted, each blacker than the one that went before, but each followed by the words :

> For all this his anger is not turned away,
> But his hand is stretched out still ;

and we can feel the stress upon that word ' still ' increasing in force at each repetition until it seems as if it must break down under the weight.

But repetition, in one form or another, is useful to the writer of prose also. Formerly he used it whenever he wished to be impressive : now he often employs it for the sake of clearness. In the latter case, however, the writer needs to be wary and diplomatic, for the reader is apt to resent the implication that he is dull of apprehension.

[1] Moulton, *Modern Reader's Bible*, p. 481.

Macaulay's hammer-blows, it must be confessed, deafen at times with their insistence ; and Bagehot's painstaking desire to be clear makes him annoying on occasion. But the following passage from Burke's *Speech on American Taxation* shows how effectively the device may be used in prose :

> How we have fared since then—what woeful variety of schemes have been adopted ; what enforcing, and what repealing ; what bullying, and what submitting ; what doing, and undoing ; what straining, and what relaxing ; what assemblies dissolved for not obeying, and called again without obedience ; what troops sent out to quell resistance, and on meeting that resistance, recalled ; what shiftings, and changings, and jumblings of all kinds of men at home, which left no possibility of order, consistency, vigour, or even so much as a decent unity of colour in any one public measure—It is a tedious, irksome task.

Then there is Kinglake's fine description of the desert in *Eothen* to show in how telling a manner a skilful prose-writer can dwell upon a single word :

> As long as you are journeying in the interior of the Desert you have no particular point to make for as your resting-place. The endless sands yield nothing but small stunted shrubs ; even these fail after the first two or three days, and from that time you pass over broad plains—you pass over newly-reared hills—you pass through valleys dug out by the last week's storm,—and the hills and the valleys are sand, sand, sand, still sand, and only sand, and sand, and sand again.

The dreary monotony of it all could not better be conveyed.

The more subtle forms of repetition also find their way into beautiful prose, but naturally the writer has to be both sparing and skilful in their use. He needs a delicate

ear to make the fine distinction between sweet music and a mere jingle. Ruskin and Burke use consonance very effectively. Stevenson makes his vowels do his bidding, whether to give an idea of sameness by repetition, as in

*One won*derful *glo*ry of fairy *gol*d,

or of changing scenes by variation as in

He watches the long train sweep away.

The writer, then, has ever been fashioning new instruments for his use, or acquiring fresh aptitude in handling those bequeathed to him from the past. He has taken the artless pleasure in repetition that the child shares with primitive man, and on it has based his patterns. Nor is the modern adult innocent in the matter of a sneaking regard for repetition, for has not Sir Leslie Stephen told us of Alpine climbers who amuse themselves in rolling stone after stone down precipitous slopes out of sheer delight in doing the same thing again and again?

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

For comments upon Browning's queer rimes see G. K. Chesterton's monograph in the "English Men of Letters" series pp. 50, 152. The *Ingoldsby Legends*, Gilbert's comic operas, the *Biglow Papers*, as well as Browning's poems, will afford abundant examples of curious and interesting rime-effects. Pope in his *Essay on Criticism* and Colvin in his *Life of John Keats* (pp. 211, 212) give useful comments on the subject of rime. See also Poe, *Marginalia*, p. 233 ("Bohn's Popular Library"). Good examples of alliteration may be found in the work of Masefield, Yeats, De la Mare, and Ruskin. The latter will also give instances of vowel-repetition and consonance. Consonance is clearly explained in Frederic

Harrison's *Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill, and other Literary Estimates*. Examples of this device are to be found in the works of Burke, Ruskin, Milton, and Coleridge. For the effective repetition of a word see Lear's 'never' (Act V, Scene III), and for repetition of phrase see Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (I, Canto VIII, v. 32–34). Instances of the use of the refrain occur throughout the Book of Psalms (*e.g.*, lxxx, cxxxvi). These are set out most effectively in Moulton's *Modern Reader's Bible*.

EXERCISES

1. Comment upon the presence or absence of end-rime in the following: *Paradise Lost, Thyrsis, The Merchant of Venice, The Dunciad, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Collins's *Ode to Evening*. In cases where end-rime is not employed, see if you can discover any other forms of recurrence that may be used in its place.

2. Write critical notes upon the rimes in the passages quoted:

(*a*) There are who lord it o'er their fellow men
With most prevailing tinsel: who unpen
Their baaing vanities, to browse away
The comfortable and juicy hay
From human pastures. KEATS

(*b*) It's a question with me if you ever survey'd a
More stern-looking mortal than old Torquemada.
BARHAM

(*c*) With the noise of fountains wondrous,
And the parle of voices thund'rous. KEATS

(*d*) Ungrateful wretch, with mimic airs grown pert,
She dares to steal my fav'rite lover's heart.
POPE

3. Name and comment on the various forms of recurrence in the following passages:

(*a*) For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little.
Isaiah xxviii, 10

(*b*) The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament showeth his handywork.
Psalms xix, 1

(*c*) The age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. BURKE

(*d*) The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
Th' assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge.
CHAUCER

(*e*) Here and there an angry spot of thunder, a grey stain of storm, moving upon the burning field; and here and there a fixed wreath of white volcano smoke, surrounded by its circle of ashes; but for the most part a great peacefulness of light. RUSKIN

CHAPTER V

THE FIGURES OF SPEECH

I sit, and play with similes.
WORDSWORTH

THERE is a plain and obvious way of saying a thing ; a bare, unadorned statement of fact that has the merit of clearness, but otherwise has no claim upon our attention. I may say, for example, that " Life is short," or remark that " I have read many books," but I can hardly claim that these observations are original, beautiful, or startling. Indeed, they are not properly mine at all : they are the common property of mankind. When, however, Andrew Marvell says,

> At my back I always hear
> Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near ;
> And yonder all before us lie
> Deserts of vast eternity,

and when John Keats says,

> Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
> And many goodly states and kingdoms seen ;
> Round many western islands have I been
> Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold,

then we feel that two commonplace remarks have been transformed into something beautiful, individual, and immortal.

No literary artist is satisfied with bare statements of fact. He does his thoughts the honour of wishing to

clothe them fittingly : he desires to please his readers by presenting them with a beautiful word-picture. Far from being a matter of superficial ornament, this desire arises from deep feeling. To a man who has felt intensely, a prosaic, matter-of-fact mode of expression is wholly inadequate. As his emotion is deep, so he wishes his embodiment of it to be beautiful or forcible, or both.

Now among the ways of decking out a thought that have occurred to men from very early times is the device of finding a likeness between the object of the thought and something else. This is really another manifestation of that fundamental delight in repetition that we have already remarked. Like suggests like, and so, instead of uttering the obvious, inexpressive, and uninteresting dictum " Life is short," the poet says :

> As for man his days are as grass ;
> As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.
> For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone :
> And the place thereof shall know it no more.

The truth is plain enough, but the resemblance between man and grass, or man and the flowers of the field, is not so clear. A man may give theoretical assent to the idea that he is mortal, but the comparison between himself and such things of a day as grass and flowers is, when he grasps its meaning for the first time, startling indeed.

The desire to present a truth in this way gives rise to all the varieties of ' tropes ' or ' figures of speech ' that abound in our literature, and the discovery of likenesses, more or less subtle, gives us those particular figures known as ' similes.' Incidentally it is interesting to note that this very idea of the shortness of life, which occurs

sooner or later to every man upon the earth, has given rise to more similes than any other. There is, for instance, that *tour de force* in Wisdom (v, 9–13) :

> Those things all passed away as a shadow, and as a message that runneth by ; as a ship that passeth through the billowy water, whereof, when it is gone by, there is no trace to be found, neither pathway of its keel in the billows ; or as when a bird flieth through the air, no token of her passage is found, but the light wind, lashed with the stroke of her pinions, and rent asunder with the violent rush of the moving wings, is passed through, and afterwards no sign of her coming is found therein ; or as when an arrow is shot at a mark, the air disparted closeth up again immediately, so that men know not where it passed through : so we also, as soon as we were born, ceased to be.

This, and many other expressions of the extreme brevity of life, we may contrast with a modern poet's embodiment of the contrary thought. For Oona, in W. B. Yeats's play *The Countess Cathleen*, life has been bitter and too long, and the author makes her say :

> Tell them who walk upon the floor of peace
> That I would die and go to her I love,
> The years like great black oxen tread the world,
> And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
> And I am broken by their passing feet.

The most effective similes, generally speaking, are those where a casual glance shows no resemblance whatever, but where a closer inspection reveals that, in the respect specified, the two dissimilar things are really alike. For example, in Keats's lines

> The clouds were pure and white as flocks new-shorn
> And fresh from the clear brook,

the words " pure and white " provide the clue. By

their help we are able to link up clouds and new-shorn flocks. So also when Mark Tapley feelingly reproached the sea as being " as nonsensical a thing as any going," further asserting that " like them Polar bears in the wild-beast shows as is constantly a-nodding their heads from side to side, it never can be quiet," we have the common factor of restlessness joining two things apparently so dissimilar as a stormy sea and a polar bear. It is the fascination of solving a puzzle which is not too hard that gives simile its charm, and the discipline of finding all manner of hidden correspondences that makes it valuable. A good simile takes away the reader's breath just for a moment, as in the lines

> I saw Eternity the other night.
> Like a great ring of pure and endless light;
>
> VAUGHAN

or here :

> He mourns that day so soon has glided by :
> E'en like the passage of an angel's tear
> That falls through the clear ether silently ;
>
> KEATS

or again in this picture of a modern industrial city :

> The tall stacks,
> Like giant pencils, write
> Broad smears across the visage of the day,
>
> PERCY HASELDEN

One that is so well worn, or so obvious as to have lost this power of surprise, has also lost its literary value, as when we say, " The brothers are as like as two peas." On the other hand, the likeness must not be so subtle as to hold the reader up indefinitely. A balance has to be struck between the obvious and the far-fetched. A simile that depends upon a correspondence of sounds

and not of ideas fails to strike the imagination. We have an example of this in the alliterative simile that Shakespeare appropriately puts into the mouth of the Second Carrier in 1 *Henry IV* :

> Peas and beans are as dank here as a dog.

When, however, Byron likens the sun rising on a misty morning to

> A drunken man's dead eye in maudlin sorrow

the comparison is more forceful than elegant. For homely strength it would be difficult to surpass the prophet's denunciation in 2 Kings xxi, 13, where the Lord is made to say :

> I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.

But the figure becomes even more striking when the writer boldly abandons any attempt to explain himself, and, full of confidence in the truth of his likeness, leaves us to unravel the mystery for ourselves. Instead of saying, " This is like that, because——," he positively asserts, " This *is* that," without further explanation, thus giving us a ' metaphor.' One says

> As for man his days are as grass ;
> As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth ;

the other declares

> Man is a bubble.

The maker of this metaphor, thinking of man's frailty, asks to what he shall liken him ; and, finding his answer most effectively in a bubble, he boldly disregards the many differences between the two, risks the possibility of misconception, and proclaims that these two are one.

Metaphor is as effective as it is hazardous. The writer stakes everything upon a single throw. But the results of that throw, when the hand is skilled, constitute one of the chief glories of literature. One or two examples must suffice here. Keats, in describing a morning scene, says that the drooping leaf-buds

> Had not yet lost their starry diadems
> Caught from the early sobbing of the morn;

and Francis Thompson, at the conclusion of *The Mirage*, says of his poem:

> This poor song that sings of thee,
> This fragile song, is but a curled
> Shell outgathered from thy sea
> And murmurous still of its nativity;

while John Masefield asserts grimly enough that

> Life's a long headache in a noisy street.

Edgar Allan Poe, a good judge of these matters, says in *Marginalia* that one of the most original, striking, and well-sustained metaphors he could call to mind was from James Puckle's *Gray Cap for a Green Head*: "In speaking of the dead, so fold up your discourse that their virtues may be outwardly shown, while their vices are wrapped up in silence."

A writer will revel in these correspondences, queer or homely, beautiful or incongruous, just as he takes delight in finding correspondences in sound. A sonnet is in turn a cell, a key, a glorious lamp, and a trumpet. The daisy is a demure nun, a sprightly maiden, a Cyclops, a shield, and a star. Dickens takes a particular delight in all manner of Puckish comparisons. The fiddler tuned like

fifty stomach-aches ; the skylight at Todgers's was a sort of big human cucumber-frame ; and Joe in his Sunday clothes was like " a scarecrow in good circumstances." In much the same spirit Lowell says in the *Biglow Papers* :

> Th' older a Guv'ment is, the better't suits ;
> New ones hunt folks's corns out like new boots :
> Change jest for change is like those big hotels
> Where they shift plates, an' let ye live on smells.

The effective metaphor, like the effective simile, makes the reader gasp a little with surprise. When it ceases to astonish, then it ceases to have life. The pages of our books are strewn with these dead metaphors. As Carlyle has reminded us, ' attention,' a plain, matter-of-fact word now, is in reality a ' stretching-to.' Here we see the primitive search for likenesses ; the analogy drawn between mind and muscle, between the mental attitude of alertness and the action that was often associated with it. But now, to the generality of readers, the word conveys nothing of this. As a metaphor it is dead : so with ' pondering,' ' explanation,' and many another seemingly commonplace word.

Not only did our ancestors search for likenesses ; they also persisted in regarding everything in nature as a person. Just as a child attributes feelings to its doll, and prattles, without the least self-consciousness, to the spoon with which it raps upon the table, so our forefathers addressed hill and plain, the broad sea and the rushing torrent, as sentient beings that could hear, understand, and reply. What an interesting place the world must have been then ! Earth, sea, and sky were peopled with wonderful creatures having magical powers. A man who had lost his hat in the breeze knew that Mercury,

the herdsman of Apollo's oxen, was playing his customary pranks. The moonbeams glancing upon the waters of the lake were silver arrows that Diana had taken from her ivory quiver, and the slender crescent moon was her bow. So the old Greeks made poetry out of the commonplace. The Norseman, too, heard in the thunder not the collision of blind forces, but the reverberations of Thor's mighty hammer-blows. The icebergs that drifted in those Northern seas were not inert masses floating hither and thither at the behest of unseen and irrevocable laws: they were the cows of Giant Hymir, the same terrible monster who eyed the rocks so fiercely that they split under his glance.

All folklore tells a similar story of the primitive instinct from which has sprung the literary device known as 'personification.' This, like metaphor, plays a very important part in our literature. It can be really successful, however, only when it arises quite naturally from a spirit which is akin to that of those former days when personification was a reality and not a pose. The Greek who talked of Apollo's fiery darts was not consciously expressing a pretty idea. It was that incidentally, but to him it was a reality which, under the Southern sun, could be painful at times. With many of our own poets, on the other hand, particularly in the eighteenth century, personification was an artifice and no more. They were men of the world, and knew nothing of the primitive, childlike spirit that could people the spaces with its own creations and believe in them. The primary emotions had vanished. So their attempts at personification are, for the most part, flat and unconvincing; consisting chiefly in remembering to replace a small letter by a capital.

Pope wrote patronizingly of the poor Indian

> whose untutor'd mind
> Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind,

and the gulf between the Indian and himself is shown in the weak personifications of the following lines from the *Dunciad* :

> But held in ten-fold bonds the Muses lie,
> Watch'd both by Envy's and by Flatt'ry's eye :
> There to her heart sad Tragedy addrest
> The dagger wont to pierce the Tyrant's breast ;
> But sober History restrain'd her rage,
> And promised Vengeance on a barb'rous age.

This is merely a conventional mode of writing. We may give an intellectual assent to what Pope has to tell us, but we cannot persuade ourselves that we actually see the flash of Envy's eye or the glint on the uplifted dagger of Tragedy. These things are purely ornamental, and what Lowell termed " the easy magic of a capital letter " leaves the reader unmoved.

Now let us glance at some of the work of a modern poet, Francis Thompson, and mark the effect of his essays in personification :

> As an Arab journeyeth
> Through a sand of Ayaman,
> Lean Thirst, lolling its cracked tongue,
> Lagging by his side along ;
> And a rusty-wingèd Death
> Grating its low flight before,
> Casting ribbèd shadows o'er
> The blank desert, blank and tan :
> He lifts by hap towards where the morning's roots are
> His weary stare,—
> Sees, although they plashless mutes are,
> Set in a silver air

Fountains of gelid shoots are,
Making the daylight fairest fair ;
Sees the palm and tamarind
Tangle the tresses of a phantom wind ;—
A sight like innocence when one has sinned !
A green and maiden freshness smiling there,
While with unblinking glare
The tawny-hided desert crouches watching her.

Here is no pretty ornament, but a vision that is, to use Byron's words, " horribly beautiful . . . charming the eye with dread." The poet does not patronize the Arab : he captures his point of view. What is more, he makes us feel, just as the Arab feels, the malignant personality of the Thirst that stalks so ominously by his side, and of the Death that hovers over him with an ever-deepening shadow. These are no abstractions touched up a little for effect, and the fact that Thompson gave ' desert ' a small ' d ' in the last line does not hinder that line from presenting the most striking picture of all.

So in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the Fairy tells Robin Goodfellow of the tall cowslips that are Titania's pensioners :

In their gold coats spots you see ;
Those be rubies, fairy favours,
In those freckles live their savours :
I must go seek some dew-drops here,
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear,

and Tennyson, looking wistfully at the dying Year, says :

He froth'd his bumpers to the brim ;
A jollier year we shall not see.
But tho' his eyes are waxing dim,
And tho' his friends speak ill of him,
He was a friend to me.

Old year, you shall not die ;
We did so laugh and cry with you,
I've half a mind to die with you,
Old year, if you must die.

Here is the child-spirit that is essential to good personification. Everything around us has feeling, and this feeling the child and the poet have to interpret to folk of duller perception. Ruskin has said hard things about the " pathetic fallacy," by which water is in some circumstances termed cruel, and in others wayward and indolent. As nobody could employ this so-called pathetic fallacy more effectively than Ruskin himself his strictures are more surprising than convincing. Certainly the instinct that led him to describe so beautifully the " *stern* silence " of Calais church-tower was sounder than the reason that led him to condemn such descriptions when used by other writers. Wordsworth's statement that

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air ;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there,

is not fallacious or even merely fanciful, but eminently true.

Simple personification, however, has developed in several directions. That " Honesty is the best policy " is a dull and lifeless statement that will interest nobody, but if I personify and make a Mr Honesty resist temptation with happy consequences, then I stand a chance of arousing some interest. I may go further and bring a Mr Subtle who argues very plausibly with my Mr Honesty, but is appropriately worsted at the end ; then I have a ' fable,' to which my abstract statement may be appended

as a moral. I need not stop there, but may proceed to show Mr Honesty surrounded by friends and foes: Mrs Guile and Mr Cunning, Mr Truthful and Miss Innocence. With these and others he would have dealings, and after passing through all manner of vicissitudes would reach a ripe and fortunate old age. This would be an 'allegory.'

In poetry like that of Shelley or tales like those of Uncle Remus, however, we meet personification of a totally different order. Take as an example the following fragment from *Prometheus Unbound*:

> The pale stars are gone!
> For the sun, their swift shepherd,
> To their folds them compelling,
> In the depths of the dawn,
> Hastes, in meteor eclipsing array, and they flee
> Beyond his blue dwelling,
> As fawns flee the leopard.

There are no veiled meanings here. The sun is a person living in a world that is quite independent of human needs or sanctions. The stars scatter hurriedly at his approach, and sink into the obscure depths far beneath the great blue dome where he reigns supreme. In this fragment Shelley has given us a 'myth': a more elaborate example of which may be seen in *The Cloud*. Dawn and Cloud, it will be observed, are not personified to act as foils to humanity, as, in Thompson's poem, the grisly figures of Thirst and Death serve to accentuate the Arab's extremity. Neither is it for the purpose of inculcating moral or religious truths, as in *Æsop's Fables* or Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*; nor as a satire upon the follies of mankind, as in *Gulliver's Travels* or Anatole France's *Penguin Island*. The myth is innocent of all these special purposes. It is an Aladdin's carpet transporting

us to a new world beyond the confines of space, or a time-machine taking us back to a point before the years began. It deals with a realm where human credit is worthless and human scruples are unknown. And Shelley stands pre-eminent among modern poets as a maker of myths because, as Stopford Brooke says, he "could strip himself clean of humanity . . . and move among the elements like one of themselves."

"But that was cheating," objected the little boy when Uncle Remus described the curious means by which Brer Tarrypin had won the race. Older people have been just as perturbed about the doings of the gods upon Mount Olympus. But the beauty of the myth lies in the fact that there are no morals save of its own creation. We are given a holiday from ourselves, our customs, and our laws. We enter a new and gloriously irresponsible world where our little cares and preoccupations disappear for the nonce, and the wildly improbable becomes the commonplace.

The Western mind has never been able quite to reconcile itself to the use of figurative language, even in its humbler forms. It has used it, but in a shamefaced sort of way, as if to confess, "I do not, of course, really mean anything so extravagant." The Eastern writer, however, has flung his tropes broadcast with a reckless abandon that sometimes offends and puzzles the Western reader, but it gives his writing both the delicate intricacy of carved ivory and the grotesque glory of a gorgeous tapestry. We have convenient examples in Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyám* and in the Hebrew poetry of the Bible. There is, for instance, that familiar passage in Ecclesiastes beginning, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth," and ending :

Man goeth to his long home,
And the mourners go about the streets :
Or ever the silver cord be loosed,
Or the golden bowl be broken,
Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,
Or the wheel broken at the cistern.
Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was :
And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Figures are not often used so freely and so naturally with us, although there are some conspicuous examples of a kindred richness of imagery, as, to mention but one, in Francis Thompson's *Essay on Shelley*. But, whether their use be prodigal or sparing, figures are valuable most of all because they open our eyes to unsuspected glories. They help us to see correspondences of which we should never have dreamed, and so lead us naturally to a conception of the unity underlying all outward differences. " What," asked William Blake, " when the sun rises, do you see ? A round disc of fire, something like a guinea ! Oh, no, no. I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying :

' Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.' "

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

A good general treatment of the subject of figures of speech is given in Moulton's *Modern Study of Literature* and Hudson's *Introduction to the Study of Literature*. Raymond's *Poetry as a Representative Art* may also be consulted with advantage. The personification of moral qualities in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and of wisdom in Proverbs and Wisdom should be noted. Dickens and Kipling both excel in out-of-the-way comparisons. See Mrs Meynell's essay on Dickens in *Hearts of Controversy* for some delightful illustrations.

Paradise Lost should also be studied for its comparisons; note, for example, in Book I, the island (line 192) and the moon (line 286). The characteristic difference between Eastern and Western imagery forms one of the subjects of controversy between Saladin and Sir Kenneth in *The Talisman* (ch. iii), and examples may be found in the poetical books of the Bible or in Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. George Wyndham gives some illuminating comments on Shakespeare's imagery in his introduction to *The Poems of Shakespeare*. Carlyle has a good deal to say concerning figures of speech, particularly of metaphor in *Sartor Resartus* (ch. xi), and of personification and allegory in *Heroes and Hero-worship* (Lecture I).

EXERCISES

1. Comment upon the suitability of these figurative expressions of great speed:

(*a*) There is no Secrecy comparable to Celerity; Like the Motion of a Bullet in the Ayre which flyeth so swift as it outruns the Eye. BACON

(*b*) E'en like the passage of an angel's tear
That falls through the clear ether silently.
KEATS

(*c*) Those things all passed by as a shadow, and as a message that runneth by. *Wisdom*

2. Make a list of half a dozen striking figures of speech that you have discovered in your own reading.

3. Compare the personification in the following passages:

(*a*) For Winter came: the wind was his whip:
One choppy finger was on his lip:
He had torn the cataracts from the hills
And they clanked at his girdle like manacles.
SHELLEY

(*b*) Melancholy lifts her head,
Morpheus rouses from his bed,
Sloth unfolds her arms and wakes,
Listening Envy drops her snakes.
POPE

4. Discuss the effectiveness of the imagery in the following extracts :

(*a*) The florid countenance of Mr Stryver might be daily seen, bursting out of the bed of wigs, like a great sunflower pushing its way at the sun from among a rank gardenful of flaring companions. DICKENS

(*b*) The clymit seems to me jest like a teapot made o' pewter
Our Prudence hed, thet wouldn't pour (all she could du) to suit her ;
Fust place the leaves 'ould choke the spout, so's not a drop 'ould dreen out,
Then Prude 'ould tip an' tip an' tip, till the holl kit bust clean out,
The kiver-hinge-pin bein' lost, tea-leaves an' tea an' kiver
'Ould all come down *kerswosh !* ez though the dam broke in a river. LOWELL

(*c*) As a nail sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones, so doth sin stick close between buying and selling.
Ecclesiasticus

(*d*) The skies spun like a mighty wheel ;
I saw the trees like drunkards reel,
And a slight flash sprang o'er my eyes,
Which saw no farther : he who dies
Can die no more than then I died.
BYRON

5. Rossetti said that Keats's line " There is a budding morrow in midnight " was the best image in English poetry. Do you agree ? If not, what would you suggest as an alternative ?

CHAPTER VI

WORDS AND LETTERS

> The charm
> Of words in tuneful order, . . . sweet
> For their own sakes. WORDSWORTH

THE English language is marvellously rich in apparatus for expressing fine shades of thought, but this wealth for many of us serves only to make the work of expression more difficult. Suppose, for example, that a word is required to convey an idea of the sound of the sea, not when, in compelling, majestic mood, it dashes mightily against its rocky bounds with a roar that makes all other sounds vain, but when, placid and lulling, it creeps over the level sands with a gentle insistence that can just be heard and no more. There are many words that will give something of the required idea. The sea may be said to whisper, to murmur, to sob, to sigh, or to ripple. The sound steals upon the listener ; it floats on the air ; it melts in the ear ; it is scarcely audible ; it is low, dull, stifled, and muffled ; it is gentle, soft, and faint ; its tones are liquid and soothing, dulcet and melodious. We cannot rule out any of these terms as wholly inadequate, yet the sensitive ear remains unsatisfied without knowing exactly why. Not until we turn to Shelley's *Stanzas written in Dejection* do we feel that the last word has been said :

> I could lie down like a tired child,
> And weep away the life of care

Which I have borne and yet must bear,
Till death like sleep might steal on me,
And I might feel in the warm air
My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea
Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony.

The search is ended : the inevitable word has been spoken. While we grope blindly and ineffectually, the poet with swift intuition seizes on the infallible expression of the thought. We choose doubtfully : for him there is no alternative. This is the incommunicable gift of genius. The ability to write in a competent fashion, to express one's ideas without breaking any of the canons of standard English or offending the reader's sense of appropriateness, may be learnt. It is chiefly a negative affair—the avoidance of a hundred and one pitfalls. But the grand positive virtue of being able with a sure touch to put one's hand upon the inevitable word can never be learnt. The power of appreciating it when we meet it can, however, be cultivated and is, in itself, no inconsiderable gain.

Examples are not wanting. When Shakespeare makes Lorenzo describe the stars as " still *quiring* to the young-eyed cherubins," we begin to recognize the truth of Coleridge's dictum that " it would be scarcely more difficult to push a stone out from the Pyramids with the bare hand, than to alter a word, or the position of a word, in Milton or Shakespeare (in their most important works, at least) without making the poet say something else, or something worse than he does say." And this is equally true of Keats when he tells of the astronomer's delight " when a new planet *swims* into his ken," or of W. E. Henley when he says " a great white moth *fades* miserably past." Ruskin too again and again shows the unerring touch of genius. Notice the force of the

word ' written ' in this wonderful sentence descriptive of the *Slave Ship* :

> Purple and blue, the lurid shadows of the hollow breakers are cast upon the mist of night, which gathers cold and low, advancing like the shadow of death upon the guilty ship as it labours amidst the lightning of the sea, its thin masts *written* upon the sky in lines of blood, girded with condemnation in that fearful hue which signs the sky with horror, and mixes its flaming flood with the sunlight, and, cast far along the desolate heave of the sepulchral waves, incarnadines the multitudinous sea.

No less sure is Robert Bridges, speaking of night " *crowding* up the barren fells " ; or Francis Ledwidge, picturing a silent bat as it comes in the evening " *dipping up* the gloom " ; or Hilaire Belloc, telling of the " *untragic* sadness " which may be found " in the drooping and wide eyes of extreme old age." Such words defy analysis ; they take the reader most delightfully by surprise, and leave him with a catch in the breath, wondering. He can then appreciate Tennyson's famous line,

> All the charm of all the Muses often flowering in a lonely word,

which is itself an embodiment of the virtue that the poet was praising in Virgil. The beauty of the line lies in the wonderful effectiveness of the word ' lonely,' coming so surprisingly after such a breathless rush of syllables. The reader cannot choose but pause, and so the writer has made his point.

A word is often made effective by contrast. Satan, endeavouring to rouse a spirit of revolt in the breast of Beelzebub, says :

> What though the field be lost ?
> All is not lost—the unconquerable will,
> And study of revenge, immortal hate,
> And courage never to submit or yield ;

and the word ' unconquerable ' gains tremendously in force and significance because it comes after such a succession of monosyllables. It is as if the stark hopelessness of the fallen angels' plight were itself a measure of the invincibility of their will-power. So in *Lines to an Indian Air* the word ' Champak,' which has been criticized as the one blot upon an otherwise perfect poem, reveals the fact that Shelley was wiser than his critics :

I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are shining bright :
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Hath led me—who knows how ?
To thy chamber window, Sweet !

The wandering airs they faint
On the dark, the silent stream—
The Champak odours fail
Like sweet thoughts in a dream ;
The nightingale's complaint,
It dies upon her heart ;—
As I must on thine,
Oh, belovèd as thou art !

Oh lift me from the grass !
I die ! I faint ! I fail !
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale.
My cheek is cold and white, alas !
My heart beats loud and fast ;—
Oh ! press it to thine own again,
Where it will break at last.

The poet's instinct told him that the languorous music of the lines would be cloying and ineffective were it unrelieved, and the snapping sound of the word ' Champak '

gives just the necessary touch of contrast. It is, in the true sense of the term, the beauty-spot of the poem.

Proper names play no mean part in producing fine literary effects. They can, indeed, be made full of significance and beauty. The extreme care which Henry James exercised in the choice of names for his characters has been placed on record, though the results in this particular case are not, it must be confessed, always commensurate with the amount of effort put forth. Still, the proper name is a factor which good writers have never failed to appreciate. Thackeray's Rebecca Sharp, Dr Swishtail, and Reginald Cuff will readily occur to the reader as examples of the broader effects possible in this direction. Dickens was an adept at this sort of thing, as is seen in the Eatanswill Election, Sairey Gamp, Mr Gradgrind, Dotheboys Hall, and Mark Tapley. More significant still is Montague Tigg, that queer admixture of gentility and shabbiness, bombast and meanness. When first we make his acquaintance the shabby and mean side is very much to the fore, and he is appropriately named Montague Tigg: afterward, when he blossoms forth as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company, his creator cleverly varies his name and he becomes Tigg Montague, Esq.

A name by its beauty of sound and wealth of association may also lend lustre and distinction to a line. As R. L. Stevenson says in *Across the Plains*, "None can care for literature in itself who do not take a special pleasure in the sound of names," and he follows with a delightful passage into which American names are woven with a charming and delicate grace, aptly pointing his remarks. How much of the charm of Homer is due to

"the vowelled place-names of Grecian story" that figure so prominently there? And Virgil's shepherds—Corydon, Thyrsis, Lycidas, and the rest—not only give lustre to his own pages, but have formed part of the poet's stock-in-trade ever since.

Sometimes we are given proper names in a long and high-sounding roll. One name will call up many others by association, and so we have a list—yet much more than a mere list—a demonstration of what may be done in the way of harmonious arrangement with even the most intractable material. In describing the Doctour of Phisik Chaucer gives such a bead-roll of the old physicians:

> Wel knew he the olde Esculapius
> And Deyscorides, and eek Rufus,
> Olde Ypocras, Haly and Galyen,
> Serapion, Razis and Avycen,
> Averrois, Damascien and Constantyn,
> Bernard and Gatesden and Gilbertyn.

So formidable an array of names effectually overawes the layman and prepares him to sit in all humility at the feet of such a master. The device is by no means an uncommon one. Spenser uses it to good purpose in the *Faerie Queene*. In the first book, for example, he names the proud and mighty Romans of old time, and in the fourth he enumerates all the personages who attended the wedding of Thames and Medway:

> First came great Neptune, with his three-forked mace,

with Amphitrite his queen, and all the sea-gods; then followed the founders of nations, the rivers, and the sea-nymphs. So through many pages the list continues, until Spenser himself breathlessly calls a halt and declares.

> My Muse herself now tired has.

And again he cries despairingly as he takes up the story in the next canto :

> O ! what an endless work have I in hand.

The reader who allows himself to skip these pages as unimportant and uninteresting assuredly misses much in all the pomp and circumstance of such a mighty muster-roll.

Other examples of a more modest kind may be found in that passage in the eighteenth book of the *Iliad* where Homer recounts the names of " the bright Nereides," and in a similar passage in Robert Bridges' *Eros and Psyche* (March, Stanzas 27–28). Should the reader imagine that such a roll is a purely mechanical affair and not true poetry, he might try his hand at rearranging one of these lists.

Proper names may be bunched in this way in order to give sonority to the lines, or they may be used for emphasis and illustration, as in this extract from Jeremy Taylor :

> A soldier must not think himself unprosperous, if he be not successful as the son of Philip, or cannot grasp a fortune as big as the Roman empire. Be content, that thou art not lessened as was Pyrrhus ; or if thou beest, that thou art not routed like Crassus : and when that comes to thee, it is a great prosperity that thou art not caged and made a spectacle, like Bajazet, or thy eyes were not pulled out, like Zedekiah's, or that thou wert not flayed alive, like Valentinian. If thou admirest the greatness of Xerxes, look also on those that digged the mountain Atho, or whose ears and noses were cut off because the Hellespont carried away the bridge.

It has been said that " Milton can get more vibration out of a word than any other poet in our language," and

certainly none of the English poets could use proper names to better purpose. Here are one or two examples :

> The moon, whose orb
> Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
> At evening, from the top of Fesolé,
> Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands,
> Rivers, or mountains in her spotty globe.
>
> Others, with vast Typhœan rage more fell,
> Rend up both rocks and hills, and ride the air
> In whirlwind—Hell scarce holds the wild uproar—
> As when Alcides, from Œchalia crowned
> With conquest, felt th' envenomed robe, and tore
> Through pain up by the roots Thessalian pines,
> And Lichas from the top of Œta threw
> Into th' Euboic sea.
>
> As when far off at sea a fleet descried
> Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
> Close sailing from Bengala, or the isles
> Of Ternate and Tidore, whence the merchants bring
> Their spicy drugs.

From the sublime to the ridiculous—after *Paradise Lost, Rejected Addresses* ! James and Horace Smith, the joint authors of the latter collection of parodies, also knew the value of proper names, as is shown in the following lines :

> An awful pause succeeds the stroke,
> And o'er the ruins volumed smoke,
> Rolling around its pitchy shroud,
> Concealed them from the astonished crowd.
> At length the mist awhile was cleared,
> When lo ! amid the wreck upreared,
> Gradual a moving head appeared,
> And Eagle firemen knew
> 'Twas Joseph Muggins, name revered,
> The foreman of their crew.

There *is* something in a name, and that of Joseph Muggins occurring in such a connexion is so incongruous as to force a laugh. We get a similar feeling of incongruity when Dickens speaks of Scrooge as making a Laocoön of himself with his stockings. No parodist fails to make good use of this : nicknames and irreverent clippings, like ' Master Shy ' for Shylock in the *Ingoldsby Legends*, and ' Cassy ' for Casabianca in J. C. Squire's *Tricks of the Trade* are examples.

We have seen how proper names may be clustered effectively on a page : other names may be grouped with equal effect. The catalogue, usually so lifeless and uninteresting an affair, becomes in a master's hand a bit of fine literature. That passage from Charles Lamb's *New Year's Eve* where he wistfully enumerates the many delights that are bound up with this fleeting existence—delights which he would fain take with him into the hereafter—is a good example :

> Sun, and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and fishes, and society, and the cheerful glass, and candle-light, and fire-side conversations, and innocent vanities, and jests, and *irony itself*—do these things go out with life ?

Another, upon a larger scale, is found in Shelley's *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, in which, though he confesses that

> Upon the table
> More knacks and quips there be than I am able
> To catalogize in this verse of mine,

he nevertheless manages to compile a very delightful list, from the pretty bowl of wood—not, as he is careful to state, full of wine—to " a most inexplicable thing with

lead in the middle." Yet another good example is afforded by J. C. Squire's list in *The Birds* beginning

> Yes, daw and owl, curlew and crested hern,

but the best of all literary catalogues, old or new, is, I am inclined to think, that remarkable inventory by Rupert Brooke entitled *The Great Lover*.

Just as it is impossible to analyse the process by which genius is enabled to secure the right word, it is equally impossible to divine the alchemy that can fuse half a dozen words into a matchless phrase or line. As Matthew Arnold pointed out, however, the presence or absence of this power is not a bad test of poetry. We see it in the last line of Meredith's sonnet *Lucifer in Starlight*:

> Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
> The army of unalterable law.

Here the word 'unalterable' would seem to contain the secret: substitute 'inexorable,' which has pretty much the same meaning and an equal number of syllables, and the line is spoilt; partly no doubt because then the stress would fall upon the short vowel in 'ex' instead of upon the long vowel in 'alt.' Meredith gives us another good example at the end of *Modern Love*:

> Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
> To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!

The silvery echoes of the monosyllables sound the clearer for the mighty reverberations of the preceding line.

There is a marvellously sonorous line in Milton's ode *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*:

> While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmèd wave,

while Keats's

> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn

is a general favourite. Dr Hugh Walker cites this, together with Coleridge's

> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise,

and Swinburne's (from *Tristram of Lyonesse*)

> And over them, while death and life shall be,
> The light and sound and darkness of the sea.

Lord Morley, in his *Life of Gladstone*, recounts a delightful chat with the veteran statesman upon this subject, when he gave as his choice Wordsworth's

> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

Lord Morley's own preference, as Sir Edward Cook in an interesting chapter tells us, is for Shakespeare's line

> After life's fitful fever he sleeps well,

which is, he avers, " the most melting and melodious single verse in all the exercises of our English tongue." Tennyson, who certainly has some claims to be heard upon the subject, chose Wordsworth's line

> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

which was, he said, " almost the grandest in the English language, giving the sense of the abiding in the transient."

But for grim strength it would be difficult to surpass that line from William Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung* where Sigurd, whose " eyes were the eyes of Odin " and whose " face was the hope of the world," calls passionately to Brynhild :

And he saw the eyes of Brynhild, and turned from the word she spake :
" I will not wed thee, Sigurd, nor any man alive."

It is, as Professor C. H. Herford says, " a great line, terrible in its naked simplicity, preluding the ruin which she is about to bring upon them both," but to appreciate its force it is necessary to read the whole story as Morris relates it.

It would be ungracious after considering such instances to dwell overmuch upon the other side of the question, yet it is instructive to note examples of ' flat lines,' where the writers have, for some reason or other, sunk into the lowest depths of bathos. Critics have often made merry at Wordsworth's expense, and his

Jones ! as from Calais southward you and I,

and that other line of his,

A Mister Wilkinson, a clergyman,

have become classical examples of the bathetic. But Wordsworth, dull though he was at times, has been given an unfair prominence in this matter, and many another could run him close. When, for example, Milton makes the Son of God say to the Tempter,

I never liked thy talk, thy offers less,

we feel that he has fallen sadly from the epic heights. The palm, however, is surely due to Coventry Patmore, who endeavours to move us to rapture with a description of the three-days wife at the seaside being fitted with a pair of sand-shoes. This process completed, she turns to her husband, saying :

I'm ready, Felix ; will you pay ?

No better illustration could be found of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's assertion that "the capital difficulty of verse consists in saying ordinary things."

This does not apply, of course, to a line which is made harsh and discordant of set purpose. The same poet who composed the exquisite verbal melody of the lines

> A savage place ! as holy and enchanted
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon-lover !

could write

> Perhaps it is the owlet's scritch :
> For what can ail the mastiff bitch ?

and in both cases accomplished his purpose with masterly technique. If there be any beauty in the apt fulfilment of intention then we cannot deny it even to the latter example, but in no way could we term it 'flat.'

In the hands of a master-craftsman the length of the line may become wonderfully significant. The short line in William Blake's

> Pretty joy !
> Sweet joy, but two days old.
> Sweet joy I call thee ;
> Thou dost smile,
> I sing the while ;
> Sweet joy befall thee !

gives an impression of the artlessness and simplicity of early infancy. On the other hand, the long line in Tennyson's

> Follow Light, and do the Right—for man can half control
> his doom—
> Till you find the deathless Angel seated in the vacant tomb,

fitly enshrines a weighty thought concerning man's purpose in this life and his destiny in the life to come. Then in Shelley's

> Hail to thee, blithe Spirit !
> Bird thou never wert,
> That from Heaven, or near it,
> Pourest thy full heart
> In profuse strains of unpremeditated art,

the varying line-length seems to suggest the rise and fall in the skylark's song until a prolonged and glorious trill announces that the zenith has been achieved.

Frederic Harrison has referred to the fashion for extremely long lines set by Tennyson, whose fondness for them became almost a disease. The first line of *Kapiolani* has twenty-three syllables :

> When from the terrors of Nature a people have fashion'd and worship a Spirit of Evil.

Such a line is cumbrous and ugly. The English language, unlike the more liquid tongues of the South, is totally unfitted to support such a burden with success. In this respect, at all events, a healthy reaction has set in, and the poets of to-day, reverting to Blake's practice, are showing the infinite possibilities of the short line. Here, as an example, are some stanzas by Mr Egbert Sandford :

> God is at the Organ !
> I can hear
> A mighty music
> Echoing, far and near.
>
> God is at the Organ !
> And its keys
> Are rolling waters, storm-strewn moorlands,
> Trees.

God is at the Organ !
I can hear
A mighty music
Echoing, far and near.[1]

If it is impossible to say precisely by what magic process single words are fused into a matchless line, it would seem almost an absurdity and an outrage to analyse the word in order to show how individual letters often contribute to its music and enforce its meaning Nevertheless the attempt may help greatly to secure true appreciation on the part of the reader ; and, as we shall see, there are abundant signs to show that a knowledge of letter-values is no negligible part of the writer's craft

How skilfully, for instance, the rush and swirl of the mountain stream is suggested by the repetition of the sibilants in the following lines from Scott's *Lady of the Lake*:

The chief in silence strode before,
And reached that torrent's sounding shore,
Which, daughter of three mighty lakes,
From Vennachar in silver breaks,
Sweeps through the plain, and ceaseless mines
On Bochastle the mouldering lines,
Where Rome, the Empress of the world,
Of yore her eagle wings unfurl'd.

While in this, from Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*, we are made to hear and to feel the hissing sea-breeze upon a bare and lonely shore, typifying desolation, ruined hopes, and a lost cause :

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam.

[1] *Brookdown* (Macdonald).

As the roar of the torrent and the scream of the gale are softened by distance into a sweet lullaby, so the sound of the hushed sibilants effectively conveys the idea of sleep in Chapman's

> Then with their nightly sacrifice each took his sev'ral tent,
> Where all receiv'd the sov'reign gifts soft Somnus did
> present,

and in this stanza from the *Faerie Queene* :

> And more to lull him in his slumber soft,
> A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down,
> And ever drizzling rain upon the loft,
> Mixt with a murmuring wind, much like the sown
> Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swown.
> No other noise, nor people's troublous cries,
> As still are wont t' annoy the walled town,
> Might there be heard : but careless Quiet lies,
> Wrapt in eternal silence far from enemies.

Here we may notice the letter *m* recurring with a lulling effect which even surpasses that of the *s*. In Tennyson's lines which follow the sibilants would seem to denote that delightful state, half sleeping, half waking, soon to give way to the repeated *m*'s as semi-consciousness is lost in slumber :

> How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
> With half-shut eyes ever to seem
> Falling to sleep in a half-dream !
> To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,
> Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height.

So in all lullabies *s*'s and *m*'s predominate. Another example may be found in these well-known lines from Gray's *Elegy* :

> Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
> And all the air a solemn stillness holds,

Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds :

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wand'ring near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

The liquid sound of the letter *l* aptly expresses any slow and gentle movements, such as that of water in W. B. Yeats's

I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore ;

or of falling leaves in William Collins's

While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves,
Or Winter, yelling through the troublous air,
Affrights thy shrinking train,
And rudely rends thy robes.

In the latter example we may note the transition to the harsher *r* sound, representing the change from quiet autumnal days to the boisterous winter gales that strip the countryside bare. Or, again, in the last line of this stanza from Gray's *Elegy* the repeated *l* sound strikes a note of tender yet unavailing regret—the regret that is felt as one goes forth, slowly and reluctantly, into the great unknown :

For who, to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind ?

F, on the other hand, suggests motion that is extremely rapid, as in Francis Thompson's *The Poppy* :

Summer set lip to earth's bosom bare,
And left the flushed print in a poppy there :

Like a yawn of fire from the grass it came,
And the fanning wind puffed it to flapping flame ;

or it may represent insidious feelings, like those of horror and affright, which spread with lightning rapidity, filling men's hearts with dismay and speechless fear :

Ev'n on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew.

Any muscular effort—effort that is plainly visible to all beholders—is conveyed by the repetition of the letters *b* and *p*, as in

And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled,

and

The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff.

The guttural sounds *g*, *k*, *j*, *ch*, on the other hand, suggest effort that is not outwardly visible, or the passive resistance of something that is hard and unyielding :

His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armèd heels.

Most of these effects are exemplified in Tennyson's *Passing of Arthur*. The description of that " last weird battle in the west " that Arthur fought is a particularly fine piece of sound-writing. Part of it has already been quoted ; here are the concluding lines :

And in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battleaxes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist ;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

The first lines here represent the full fury of the onslaught. In the combination of gutturals and sibilants we are made to hear the unspeakable din as spear shivers against coat of mail and battle-axe crashes upon helm, while the repeated aspirate tells of the laboured breathing of the combatants. The guttural and aspirate sounds gradually cease, and the *l* takes up the story, telling of a slowing down of the fierce movement as, one by one, the exhausted warriors fall to the ground. Then there comes upon the battlefield an ominous stillness that can be felt, and the *d*'s of the last line tell of the total cessation of all movement in death.

There is no denying the extreme beauty and expressiveness of such sound-effects. The possession of a cultivated and attentive ear that can catch such subtle and delightful music is essential to the due appreciation of literature. This need not lead one to the absurdity of supposing that a writer mechanically bespatters his lines with *s*'s in order to reproduce the rustle of a summer breeze in the trees, or with *m*'s to suggest slumber. Nobody who loves literature believes that its music is

wrought after that fashion. One must see, however, that the ear of a master invariably leads him to a right choice, not only of words, but of letter-sounds, and that there can be nothing like adequate appreciation on the part of a reader who does not listen as he reads.

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

Ruskin's comments on a passage from *Lycidas* in *Sesame and Lilies* show what significance may be drawn out of a single word by careful and patient scrutiny. Notice the changes that have taken place in the poet's vocabulary. With Chaucer it was perfectly natural and unaffected. With the Elizabethan it was sumptuous and more self-conscious. In the hands of the Augustan poet it became formal and artificial. Wordsworth, in the following century, pleaded by precept and example for a plain and homely diction. Since then Kipling and others have not scrupled to make abundant use of the vocabulary of street and barrack-room, and now Mr Edmund Blunden is valiantly attempting to make us see the beauty and significance of dialect. In this connexion the reader will recall Tennyson's *The Northern Cobbler* and *Owd 'Roä*. Francis Thompson will provide examples of unusual words, while Masefield uses fearlessly those that are ugly and discordant. G. K. Chesterton makes some interesting comments on the subject of ugly lines in his *Browning* ("English Men of Letters" series), ch. vi. Further search for beautiful and flat lines respectively may be left to the reader; he will find it a fascinating exercise. Milton's use of proper names is made the subject of a fine passage in Macaulay's essay on Milton, while Mrs Meynell comments upon the proper names of Dickens's characters in *Hearts of Controversy*, p. 47. Additional examples may be found in *Paradise Lost*, Book XI, line 385; *Faerie Queene*, Book I,

Canto V; Book II, Canto X; and Rossetti's *The Blessèd Damozel*. Instances of the effective use of the short line may be found in the work of Walter De la Mare, W. H. Davies, or almost any other contemporary poet. The subject of letter-values receives very full treatment in Raymond's *Poetry as a Representative Art*.

EXERCISES

1. Show how the sound echoes the sense in the following passages, and point out by what particular devices the effect is obtained :

(*a*) " And is the sea, (quoth Coridon) so fearful ? "
" Fearful much more (quoth he) than heart can fear :
Thousand wild beasts with deep mouths gaping direful
Therein still wait poor passengers to tear.
SPENSER

(*b*) We think the eagle-wingèd pride
Of sky-aspiring and ambitious thoughts,
With rival-hating envy, set on you
To wake our peace, which in our country's cradle
Draws the sweet infant breath of gentle sleep ;
Which so roused up with boisterous untuned drums,
With harsh resounding trumpets' dreadful bray,
And grating shock of wrathful iron arms,
Might from our quiet confines fright fair peace
And make us wade even in our kindred's blood.
SHAKESPEARE

(*c*) Let us . . . imagine the Mediterranean lying beneath us like an irregular lake, and all its ancient promontories sleeping in the sun : here and there an angry spot of thunder, a grey stain of storm, moving upon the burning field ; and here and there a fixed wreath of white volcano smoke, surrounded by its circle of ashes. RUSKIN

(*d*) The thunder-phrase of the Athenian, grown
Up out of memories of Marathon,
Would echo like his own sword's griding screech
Braying a Persian shield,—the silver speech
Of Sidney's self, the starry paladin,
Turn intense as a trumpet sounding in
The knights to tilt. BROWNING

2. Give examples of both sonorous and discordant lines other than those quoted in the text.

3. Comment upon the significance of the words italicized in the following passages :

(*a*) Some men with swords may reap the field,
And plant fresh laurels where they kill ;
But their strong nerves at last must yield :
They tame but one another still :
Early or late
They stoop to fate,
And must give up their murmuring breath
When they, pale captives, *creep* to death.
J. SHIRLEY

(*b*) So like a painted battle the war stood
Silenced, the living quiet as the dead.
TENNYSON

(*c*) " The sunshine may not cheer it, nor the dew ;
It cannot help itself in its decay ;
Stiff in its members, wither'd, changed of hue."
And, in my spleen I *smiled* that it was gray.
WORDSWORTH

(*d*) Then in a wailful choir the small gnats *mourn*
Among the river sallows. KEATS

4. Point out any unusual features in the diction of these lines and say whether you consider that they are justified :

(*a*) Amorist agonist man, that, immortally pining and striving,
Snatches the glory of life only from love and from war.
WATSON

(*b*) Fleet foot on the correi,
Sage counsel in cumber,
Red hand in the foray,
How sound is thy slumber.
SCOTT

(*c*) Thou rushest down in every stream
Whose passion frets my spirit's deepening gorge ;
Unhood'st mine eyas-heart, and fliest my dream.
THOMPSON

5. Invent expressive names after the manner of Dickens or Thackeray for a promoter of bogus companies, a miser, a hack-writer, a young man-about-town, a football enthusiast.

CHAPTER VII

PROSE AND POETRY

Poetry's unnat'ral.
MR WELLER, SENR.
Poetry sets the hardest lessons to music.
R. A. WILLMOTT

LET us examine three expressions that apparently embody much the same idea :

(i) All day.
(ii) From morn till eve.
(iii) " From the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings."

For brevity and clearness the first phrase cannot be surpassed. There is nothing ambiguous or undecided about it. No explanation is required. For all ordinary purposes it is sufficient and complete. At the same time it arouses no particular emotion in the reader, but is, in itself, frigid and colourless. Sometimes it is desirable to sacrifice brevity and to elaborate the expression a little. Then the colour is heightened, and we get a more spirited phrase like the second. Nothing is added to the essential thought, however, and we feel that fundamentally the two expressions are one. Just as they will suit almost any occasion, so they fail to convey any special thought or feeling. But when we come to the third phrase we are at once in a new world, with new standards of judgment. Compared with the other versions this is neither brief nor clear. It gives, indeed,

no direct expression to the thought, but suggests instead two pictures and leaves the reader to gather the underlying idea for himself. Such a roundabout mode of expression certainly seems inconsistent with the hurly-burly of affairs, where lucidity and conciseness are the cardinal virtues. Evidently it is the product of an entirely different attitude to life, and before we can appreciate it adequately we must take pains to discover what that attitude is. And though the phrase is here torn from its context, we can still see something of the beauty of the two pictures it presents: one of early morning, when the hillsides are clothed in a thick mist betokening the obscurity and wonder of a new day; the other of the cheerful hearth where the cricket's song serves to "nick the glad silent moments as they pass." The day's work has been accomplished, the mystery unfolded, and so the curtain falls upon contentment and repose.

Now there is a great gulf fixed between such expressions as "All day" or "From morn till eve" and "From the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings." They are by no means equivalent phrases expressing a common idea. The notion is quite erroneous that the first is suitable for the ordinary workaday world when time presses; the second for occasions when a little elaboration is required; and the third for those rare moments of leisure when one can afford to toy with a thought and enshrine it in elegant fashion. "All day," it is true, is prose—an ordinary phrase that will suit any occasion when no deep feeling is experienced. When, however, the poet wrote "From the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings," he was giving expression to the sudden and passionate yearning that comes upon the

exile in a London street as he thinks of his distant home. How differently the day would be spent there! "All day" would do for the deadening routine of London life, but that momentary vision of home demanded something very different. So the passionate longing that was aroused in the poet's breast struggled to find utterance in glowing words which should convey something of its depth and beauty. The fitting expression of such moments of exaltation is found in poetry.

It is interesting to observe how the same facts will move one man to produce clear and workmanlike prose in cold blood, and in another will induce that high ecstasy that can only be translated into poetry. The story of Cublai Can and his pleasure-house is set down plainly and baldly enough by old Samuel Purchas in his *Pilgrimes*, but Coleridge, coming upon this account long afterward, dreams over it so that the bare facts are caught up and transmuted into that golden fragment *Kubla Khan*. So, when the moving story of Sir John Moore's burial at Coruña came home, Southey wrote a clear and competent account of it for the Edinburgh *Annual Register*. The imagination of a young Irish clergyman who heard this read aloud was fired by it, and he wrote a poem that has given him a sure title to fame. The difference, then, does not lie in the facts or in the ideas, but in the depth of feeling which those facts or ideas induce in the observer, and in his ability to translate that feeling. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." Southey was a poet of high repute, but the story for some reason or other did not move him as it moved the obscure clergyman. Consequently those of us to-day who know anything of Southey's version know it because of its relation to Wolfe's great poem.

There is no need to discuss the vexed question of where the precise boundary should be fixed to separate poetry from prose. There is no such sharp dividing line : one fades imperceptibly into the other, and those who have a genius for classification may work their will upon all that is doubtful. Nor need we concern ourselves much with the relationship between poetry and verse. In the chapter on rhythm it was pointed out that when the feelings are normal the ordinary prose-rhythm best expresses the thoughts, and that as the feelings increase in intensity so the prose becomes more and more rhetorical and declamatory, with a strongly marked rhythm, until a point is reached where, in order to retain coherence, it is necessary to submit to the sterner discipline of verse. The fact that much poetry has been written in other than the recognized verse-forms does not affect the general truth of the statement that verse most fitly expresses great emotion, any more than the other indisputable fact that much painfully prosaic stuff has been fobbed off upon the reading public in guise of verse. We have the impassioned prose of De Quincey and of Ruskin to set off against many a dreary page of the verse of Pope or of Cowley, yet the main truth holds good that for all ordinary situations prose is the most fitting medium, while the extraordinary finds its highest and most memorable expression under the more rigorous discipline of verse-forms. The famous passage in which Dickens describes the death of Little Nell is an example of this :

> She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life ; not one who had lived and suffered death.

This is neither good prose nor good blank verse. It

illustrates what Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has termed the " capital difficulty " of prose. " While with verse, keyed for high moments, the trouble is to manage the intervals, with prose the trouble is to manage the high moments."[1] Any poem of moderate length will afford examples of the " capital difficulty " of verse. There is an easily perceptible difference between those stirring words by which Satan endeavours to rouse the other fallen angels to action and the rather tedious dialogue between Adam and Eve as to the best method of cultivating the Garden. On the one hand we have :

> To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell :
> Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heav'n,

and on the other :

> Till more hands
> Aid us the work under our labour grows,
> Luxurious by restraint : what we by day
> Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,
> One night or two with wanton growth derides,
> Tending to wild.

This does not mean, however, that the subjects of poetry are necessarily abnormal or bizarre. Poetry does not arise so much from the nature of the subject as from the attitude of the poet. A Wordsworth could write beautiful poetry about a peasant girl or a wayside flower, while another man might become insufferably prosaic over Niagara or Vesuvius. So also some pursue beauty and enshrine it in verse that is hopelessly dull, while John Masefield can boldly declare :

> Others may sing of the wine and the wealth and the mirth,
> The portly presence of potentates goodly in girth :
> Mine be the dirt and the dross, the dust and the scum of the earth !

[1] *On the Art of Writing.*

As Rupert Brooke put it : " It's not only sunlight and beautiful things. In a flicker of sunlight on a blank wall, or a reach of muddy pavement, or smoke from an engine at night, there's a sudden significance and importance and inspiration that makes the breath stop with a gulp of certainty and happiness." The poet, then, must have what Mr Clutton-Brock aptly terms high "experiencing power " : he sees more than we see, and feels more deeply than we usually feel. But if poetry makes great demands upon the poet, it also makes great demands upon the reader. Mr Nowell Smith, in a stimulating essay upon the place of literature in education,[1] says that his own crude attempts at writing a juvenile epic led him up to Milton. Having tried his own hand, he was in a position to respect the work of a master. The reader should always have sufficient knowledge to enable him to grasp the magnitude of the poet's task. This is precisely where the ordinary reader fails. A newspaper account of a football cup-tie seems to him a splendid epic telling of a glorious struggle for mastery. He devours it with the utmost eagerness, whereas Milton's purplest patches would bore him unspeakably. There is nothing fundamentally wrong in this reader's attitude. He has the necessary experiencing power, but it is woefully limited in its scope. The ' highbrows ' who would affect to despise his zeal are as mistaken as he is in imagining that they are bookworms who know nothing of life. His passion for the recital of stirring deeds is sound : it merely needs to be given a wider application.

Poetry, Wordsworth said, is " emotion remembered in tranquillity." The poet must have felt the deep emotion that, as we have seen, is the basis of all true poetry, but

[1] *Cambridge Essays on Education*, ed. by A. C. Benson.

sufficient time must have elapsed for him coolly to subject his ardour to the yoke of verse. Both tranquillity and deep feeling are necessary. Too frequently the reader is biased : either he looks for pure emotion and is impatient of the restrictions of verse, or he has a sense of formal beauty and he cannot away with any extravagance of feeling. He should be able to appreciate the nice balance between form and substance, wild emotion and controlling law, that makes the highest and noblest poetry.

" The essence of poetry, technically," says Professor Mackail, " is that it is patterned language." Pattern is, indeed, a leading characteristic of all poetry. Just as the decorative artist, after due consideration of the space at his disposal, has to make a unit that when repeated shall form a suitable and harmonious design, so the poet must consider the scope of his project and then decide upon the form of the ' repeat.' He has to concern himself with order and relation. In both cases the key to a full appreciation of the whole is found in a knowledge of the pattern. Once that is mastered much may be taken for granted. A plan is as essential to the poet as to the designer of wall-paper or tapestry. The precise nature of that plan is his own affair. He may accept one or other of the traditional verse-designs that have been handed down by the ' makers ' of long ago, or, greatly daring, he may elect to contrive an entirely new plan for himself. In the former case he will have the advantage of being able to assume that his readers will comprehend his pattern. There will be no need for explanatory prefaces to set forth the principles governing his versification : there will be no room for misunderstanding. In the latter case we must recognize that the poet has

voluntarily chosen the more difficult way. He has decided not only to execute his task, but to fashion his own tools for the work. The reader has no right to condemn the writer on that ground alone. He must take care that he is not misled by a prejudice against what is unfamiliar. He should seek to fathom the new plan, and so get the materials for a sound judgment. It may be that the new design is no improvement upon older patterns. Quite possibly the humility that does not disdain to follow tradition would become the venturesome poet better. The reader, however, has no right to assume that.

All poetry, in any case, whether the conventional iambic pentameter or the newest *vers libre,* must be constructed upon a definite plan. The poet deliberately subjects himself to the yoke of verse. If he scorns that which tradition would lay upon him, then he must fashion one for himself. But whatever be his choice, he sacrifices his freedom in one direction that he may gain more liberty in another. He cheerfully acquiesces in the restrictions of a rigid frame in order that he may weave a free and flowing design within its limits. Prose is free and knows comparatively little of rule. Verse is fixed and demands obedience to rule, but it is "an obedience that makes us free." The stress laid upon this aspect of verse has led many to agree with the elder Mr Weller's view that "poetry's unnat'ral." As a matter of fact, however, verse is one of the oldest and most natural forms of expression known to man. It is, as we have seen, the fittest vehicle for conveying deep emotion. When, for example, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who was ordinarily so careless of the poetic conventions, wished to give expression to her deepest

and most sacred feelings she chose the sonnet-form. Not only so, but her sonnets are astonishingly regular, forming a marked contrast to much of her work done in less exacting modes.

To sum up, though there is no rigid line to be drawn between poetry and prose, we may say that poetry as a rule is the expression of the emotions at their highest pitch, while prose fitly expresses normal and ordinary events. Consequently poetry is much older than prose. When there were neither books nor newspapers, and the means of expression were strictly limited, there was no attempt to give permanence to any but moments of ecstasy or exaltation. We have already seen how a tribe would meet after an overwhelming victory or a signal deliverance, and then the bard, minstrel, or ' maker would be called upon to give expression to the communal feeling. To him would be entrusted the task of giving coherence to those unformed sensations of excitement and enthusiasm that in time of stress expended themselves in unintelligible and disordered cries. As the heat of the day was succeeded by the coolness of the evening, so the vehement shouts of victory would be controlled and shaped by the laws of verse ; and as the warriors listened to the lay they would fight the battle over again in a serener and more chastened mood, swaying and dancing in time with the rhythm of the song.

Prose came later, when men had leisure and the means to write down accounts not only of rare and outstanding occasions, but also of the commonplace happenings that make up the bulk of life. And with time prose has become increasingly flexible, so that a skilful writer can use it to exhibit not only the drab and the obvious, but the startling and exceptional also. This he is able to do

by borrowing many of the devices of verse, though the main form is left free. So we get the ' poetic prose ' of Ruskin, De Quincey, Pater, and others. In general, however, it is still true that when the emotions are raised to a high pitch, their freest and fullest expression is secured by submission to the rules of verse ; and the higher and wilder the ecstasy, the more rigorous the verse-forms tend to become.

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

The essential difference between prose and poetry is set forth clearly in Sir Henry Newbolt's *New Study of English Poetry*. Hudson's *Introduction to the Study of Literature* and Moulton's *Modern Study of Literature* may also be read with advantage. The story of how Charles Wolfe's poem came to be written is told in Sir Edward Cook's *More Literary Recreations*. There are some very illuminating comments upon such questions as speed and inversion scattered throughout Edgar Allan Poe's *Marginalia*. This is appended to the collection of his essays edited by Hardress O'Grady for " Bohn's Popular Library." This volume also contains his essay entitled *The Poetic Principle*. Further hints are to be found in Macaulay's *Essay on Milton* and Emerson's " Poetry and Imagination " in *Letters and Social Aims*. As the Bible and the plays of Shakespeare contain both prose and poetry in close proximity, the reader has an opportunity of observing the difference in emotional effect. He may, for example, note the prose breaking into verse at the end of the third scene of Act III in 1 *Henry IV*. Or he may see how in *Julius Cæsar*, where the tribunes scold the crowd, Shakespeare apportions prose to the plebeians and verse to those in authority. Again, in Isaiah the prose increases in emotional content until, ever and anon, it achieves the regularity and self-control of verse.

In Moulton's *Modern Reader's Bible* the excellence of the typographical arrangement makes the distinction perfectly clear.

EXERCISES

1. Keats says, " If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all." Discuss this in connexion with the question of craftsmanship in poetry.

2. Consider the place of rules and conventions in poetry, taking the following quotation as a text :

> Some, free from rime or reason, rule or check,
> Break Priscian's head and Pegasus's neck.
>
> POPE

3. Scott makes Mr Oldbuck say, " A man may be a poet without measuring spondees and dactyls like the ancients, or clashing the ends of lines into rime like the moderns, as one may be an architect though unable to labour like a stonemason." Add your own comments upon Mr Oldbuck's ideas of versification.

4. Compare the funeral speeches delivered over Cæsar's corpse by Brutus and Mark Antony, and discuss the suitability of the respective forms in which Shakespeare cast them.

5. Macaulay says, " He who, in an enlightened and literary society, aspires to be a great poet, must first become a little child." Discuss this with special reference to the two poets Shelley and Southey.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FORMS OF VERSE

I framed to the harp
Many an English ditty lovely well,
And gave the tongue a helpful ornament.
OWEN GLENDOWER IN 1 *Henry IV*

THE two main elements in verse-design are, as we have seen, rhythm and repetition, and no more than a passing reference to them is necessary here. If, for example, from Keats's line

The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold

we omit the particle ' a ' nothing of the meaning is sacrificed, but all of the music. As it stands it is verse : if amended in the way suggested it would be prose. Then there are the various forms of repetition—head-rime and end-rime, assonance and consonance, repetition of word or phrase, and parallelism of form or thought—all of which we may conveniently include in the term ' rime.' From these two elements of rime and rhythm the thread of verse is spun. The modern poet may seek new modes, but he must make his verse rhythmical, and he cannot escape the problem of the ' repeat.'

The thread, however, has to be woven so as to produce one or other of the many verse-forms to which we have grown accustomed. The architecture of verse, to change the metaphor, is based upon parallelism. In Hebrew verse, as we have seen, it was a parallelism of idea : in English verse it is a parallelism of form. And the various

designs may be traced from the couplet, through the quatrain, and on to the more elaborate stanza-forms like those of *The Faerie Queene* or *The Scholar Gipsy*.

The parallelism of the stanza is often but a part of that larger parallelism by which the stanza-form is repeated so as to make the whole poem. The choice of method, whatever it may be, is not haphazard. Neither, on the other hand, is it merely a matter of rule. Too much stress cannot be laid upon the connexion between poetry and life. Life impels the poet to write, and the sense of fitness that is part of his equipment as a poet reveals to him the form most suited to his purpose.

A vivid thought will often flash through the mind. It is intense and clamours for expression, but with most of us the matter ends there. We get the thoughts, but we lack the power of expression ; hence, as they came, so they go. On rare occasions we may have grieved over our inarticulate condition : we may have tried to remedy it, but the result of attempting to frame our thought in suitable words probably gave us little encouragement. So now we are driven to one of two courses. Either we neglect those uncomfortable thoughts that ask for what we are incapable of giving, and foster only those that are so commonplace as to be fitly embodied in the chipped and broken language of street and market-place ; or, not content with so tame an abandonment of the struggle, we are driven to express our deepest feelings by proxy : we resort, that is, to those who have the facility that is denied to us. It is not too much to say that even in the former class there are few who, at the time of some overmastering joy or deep sorrow, do not feel the want of adequate expression. But only the reader who is familiar with the poets can find what is

suitable just when he wants it. The man who ordinarily scorns poetry finds that when he requires its solace it is not forthcoming.

When a vivid thought, then, flashes through the mind of a poet he is able to clothe it in words so beautiful and apt that they seem inevitable. It may be that he has seen a rainbow. Few of us do that without a thrill and a desire to look and look as long as the magic colours remain. But while we can go no further than a look and an exclamation, the poet is able to say:

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky:
> So was it when my life began;
> So is it now I am a man;
> So be it when I shall grow old,
> Or let me die!
> The Child is father of the Man;
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety.

Or it may be that he is exiled in London and, weary of all its dusty turmoil, he longs for home. As he stands on the hot and grimy pavement, gazing vacantly before him, there comes to him a vision of the place where he would be, and he exclaims:

> I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
> And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
> Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
> And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

Such an expression of a fleeting thought we call a lyric. As the idea which it enshrines comes unbidden upon the moment, so the resultant poem is appropriately brief, unstudied, and informal. There is neither argument

nor justification. It is but a snatch of music, careless and unambitious, yet complete within its limits and truly inspired.

The form of the lyric is suitably free, answering only to the limits of rhythm and repetition. The poet is left to write as the inspiration of the moment directs. But he will, consciously or unconsciously, neglect none of the devices that will make his verse musical—the use of long vowels, the avoidance of harsh consonants, and the contriving of a lilting rhythm.

Sometimes, however, the thought is so passionate and intense as to demand a stricter form so that it may be perfectly coherent. How well this is afforded by the sonnet is revealed in the popularity of that verse-form. With its limitation of fourteen lines, its ' turn,' and its more or less rigid rime-pattern, it gives the poet who feels that his idea is in danger of running away with him a stable framework upon which he can execute his design the more freely. The necessity of conforming with such exacting requirements forces him to keep an unruly idea well within bounds, and prevents him from being incoherent and ineffective. We have seen how a writer ordinarily so careless of convention as Elizabeth Barrett Browning was glad to use the sonnet for the expression of her deepest and most sacred feelings.

There are other more elaborate verse-forms that have developed from the lyric proper, such as the ballade, the rondeau, the triolet, and the chant royal. The sonnet, however, surpasses all these in significance and importance. They flourished in French literature at a time when a dry formalism was its main characteristic, but they have never succeeded in making themselves really at home on English soil. The rules of construction and

riming are so complicated that in these poems the matter is of necessity made to take a second place.

But such brief, informal treatment as can be accorded to an idea in any of the lyrical forms of verse may not always be adequate. The writer may wish to pursue his thought, just as in conversation one likes sometimes to explore the avenue opened up by a chance expression. There are occasions when an impromptu speech, however felicitous, would be an insult: so there are times when the lyric, for all its unstudied beauty, is insufficient. It is necessary to reinforce the primary idea by argument and illustration; to follow the clue that it gives to other thoughts; to select and arrange in logical order so that the most forcible and effective presentation of the theme may be secured. This gives us the 'ode.' Here again the form of the poem is elastic. There may be a strict parallelism of line and stanza, in which case we term the ode regular; or line-length and stanza-form may vary at the poet's discretion, when the ode is said to be irregular. Of the former we have an example in Collins's *Ode to Evening*, and of the latter in Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*. Some odes, too, are based upon classical models. Thus we have the *Horatian Ode* of Andrew Marvell, which contains the famous tribute to Charles I:

He nothing common did or mean
Upon that memorable scene,
  But with his keener eye
  The axe's edge did try;

Nor called the gods, with vulgar spite,
To vindicate his helpless right;
  But bowed his comely head
  Down, as upon a bed.

There are also the Pindaric odes modelled upon the Greek

chorus. As the singers turned from the altar to the right they sang a stanza ; then they turned again, singing an answering stanza as they retraced their steps to the altar. The first stanza was the strophe ; the second, contrasting with it, the antistrophe. After that, strophe was followed by antistrophe in regular succession until the end, when a stand was made at the altar and the conclusion of the whole matter stated in the epode. This structure may be seen clearly in the " Choric Song " of Tennyson's *Lotos-Eaters*. Each strophe tells of the languorous beauty of the island of the Lotos-Eaters ; each antistrophe of the weariness of life on the waves, or the harassing uncertainty of the future ; while the epode conveys the final resolve of the mariners to wander no more.

But, whatever may be its plan, a good ode will contain closely reasoned matter arranged in logical order ; the writer will make use of antithesis, exclamation, and all the other devices beloved of the orator ; and the whole poem will have an exalted and dignified atmosphere, making it contrast sharply with the lyric proper.

Another expansion of the lyric is the elegy. Concerning this we need only remark that is a poem of mourning, and that the less poignant and more distant the grief, the longer the poem tends to become. When the sense of loss is very near and real, it is no time for the composition of a long and elaborate poem. Lear's wild and passionate cry,

> Look on her, look, her lips,
> Look there, look there !

more truly expresses the feelings at such a time than any elegy, however beautiful, could do. When with the lapse of time the sorrow loses some of its keenness and can be

"remembered in tranquillity" as an "old, unhappy, far-off thing," or when it is a general sense of pathetic mystery such as will come to one in passing through a churchyard, then a gentler and more polished expression of grief is suitable, as we are given in Gray's *Elegy*.

All the verse-forms that have been noticed so far may be regarded as developments of the simple lyric. They, like the lyric, are the expression of the poet's personal feelings, but they are of interest to us all because those very feelings of intense joy, bitter sorrow, deep passion, and tender regret that clamour loudest for expression are common to humanity and knit us all together. So that the poet in speaking for himself lends tongues to us all. There is, however, a great class of impersonal poetry where the poet sets out to relate an incident or describe a scene, and is not primarily concerned with his own feelings. The first and oldest of the verse-forms to be included under this heading is the ballad, which stands in much the same relation to the objective poetry of which we are now speaking as the lyric does to subjective or personal poetry. The ballad is a simple, artless tale of daring exploits and marvellous escapes. It gives a whiff of the open air, and tells of a time when life was rude and unrestrained. We cross the foam with Sir Patrick Spens, or listen to the clash of arms between Douglas and Percy, or live awhile in Sherwood Forest with Robin Hood and his merry men. A doughty deed never failed to command admiration, whether done by friend or foe, and convention counted for very little then. This is reflected in the artlessness and spontaneity of the true ballad, which few modern imitations can achieve. We cannot help noting the contrast, for instance, between that famous outlaw Robin, who

took the king's horse,
Hastily in that stead,
And said, " Sir Abbot, by your leave,
A while ye must abide ;
We be yeomen of this forest,
Under the greenwood tree,
We live by our king's deer,
Other shift have not we ;
And ye have churches and rents both,
And gold full great plenty ;
Give us some of your spending,
For saint Charity,"

and the outlaw of Sir Walter Scott's ballad who said :

" Maiden ! a nameless life I lead,
A nameless death I'll die ;
The fiend, whose lantern lights the mead,
Were better mate than I !
And when I'm with my comrades met
Beneath the greenwood bough,
What once we were we all forget,
Nor think what we are now."

There is, of course, the very obvious difference between the smooth and perfectly regular rhythm of Scott's lines and the rugged directness and strength of the old ballad. The latter has the jerkiness of water that cannot come fast enough out of a bottle. The old writer told his tale as a child tells it. There is the same reckless abandon, indifference to rule, inconsequent mingling of omissions with repetitions, and, above all, breakneck speed. Apart from this, however, we cannot help feeling that Sir Walter's was but a carpet-outlaw. He showed a capacity for philosophizing and a genius for introspection of which we may be sure the bold Robin Hood was quite innocent. It is indeed difficult to recapture the spirit of a time so different from our own,

and few literary tasks are more hazardous than that of writing a true ballad in the old style. Such attempts are interesting: they are seldom convincing.

The ballad has unusual interest for us, because it is the primary literary form out of which all the others have grown. It is, as Professor R. G. Moulton so aptly terms it, "literary protoplasm," and contains in itself the three elements of speech, music, and action, which, isolated and developed, have produced forms so different as, say, one of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and a play by George Bernard Shaw. It is at once easy and fascinating to trace this development. In the first place, nothing would be more natural than the gradual clustering of tales round a hero. Robin Hood himself is a good example of this. Then, as time passed and the distance increased, so the hero would grow in stature until he assumed the proportions first of a giant and then of a god. In the beginning, no doubt, he was a jolly, companionable fellow, a little shrewder, stronger, and more dexterous than his associates. Tales of his prowess and daring were told and retold, and at each telling the marvel increased. Then, many years after, when the hero and all who knew him had long passed out of direct remembrance, and when there was therefore no check upon the veracity of the tales, some one would set to work to collect all these floating stories, to harmonize them, and to bind them into a coherent whole. So an 'epic' would be achieved, in which the artlessness of the irresponsible ballad would be exchanged for the dignity of a sonorous narrative, and its informal, breathless rhythm for a stately measure in keeping with the exaltation of the subject. The scrappy nature of short, disconnected stories, too, would be metamorphosed into

the majestic proportions befitting a great and noble theme. Besides its dignity and length, there are one or two other characteristics of the epic that are illuminating. It invariably tells of the struggle with adverse circumstances that made so large a part of life when man was fighting desperately for a mastery that we now take for granted. We see this in our own great epic *Beowulf.* The hero was engaged in a mighty struggle with the terrible monster Grendel, and his yet more terrible mother. The successful issue of this tremendous conflict brought with it for Beowulf a breathing-space, but no finality. In his old age he had to sally forth once more, this time to grapple with the dreadful fire-drake, and in that, the last and greatest of his conflicts, he achieved victory, but lost his life. The treasures guarded so jealously by the monster were now available for the use of posterity, but the hero himself was never to enjoy them. It is not difficult to interpret the story, and " to regard Beowulf's successive fights with the three dragons as the overcoming, first, of the overwhelming danger of the sea, which was beaten back by the dykes ; second, the conquering of the sea itself, when men learned to sail upon it ; and third, the conflict with the hostile forces of nature, which are overcome at last by man's indomitable will and perseverance." [1] Whether we read it thus or insist upon a more literal interpretation, it remains true that the story as we have it was told at a time sufficiently removed for passion to have cooled and the danger, once so imminent, to seem very remote. Hence the breakneck speed of the original ballad-material slows down in the epic to a measure suggesting a calm and dignified assurance.

[1] Professor W. J. Long, *History of English Literature* (Ginn).

An old epic, too, bears evident marks to show that it was originally intended for recitation and not meant to be read. Just as in Wagner's music a certain phrase termed the *leit-motiv* is used to represent a particular person, place, or mood, so in these epics set phrases were made to call up corresponding ideas in the minds of the listeners. Each character, for example, would be fitted with a stock epithet indicative of his quality, and the hearer would expect the invariable association of name and epithet in the same way that the purchaser of a proprietary article to-day looks for the trade-mark.

Conditions have changed: the writer has now to appeal to the eye as well as to the ear, and many of the accidental characteristics of the older 'epics of growth' are advisedly discarded in the more modern 'literary epics.' Tricks like the use of stereotyped phrases may be dropped with advantage, and the modern writer shows wisdom in concentrating upon the essential features of the epic—a lofty motive and a dignified treatment. Milton's poetic instinct did not lead him astray when he abjured rime and adopted heroic verse for *Paradise Lost.* What he contemptuously termed "the jingling sound of like endings" would certainly fail to induce that atmosphere of high seriousness essential to an epic. He was equally judicious in his free treatment of the metre that he chose. By skilful variation of the number of stressed syllables from the normal five to four, or an occasional three, and by allowing the sense frequently to 'overflow' from one line into another, he was able to avoid the monotony so much to be dreaded in so long a poem without any sacrifice of dignity.

But the epic was not the only development of the

ballad. As a later product we have the 'romance,' telling of the chivalrous times

> When every morning brought a noble chance,
> And every chance brought out a noble knight.

These romances date for the most part from the Middle Ages and are so named because they were told in one or other of the Romance tongues. As stories they are freer and more intimate than the epic. They are noteworthy too for certain stock situations and machinery common to them all. There is always the damsel in distress and the knight-errant who arrives in the nick of time. There is the tournament where right inevitably triumphs, and the supernatural, representing the mediæval sense of

> the burthen of the mystery
> . . . the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,

which we still feel, though we express it differently. There are mighty giants, illustrating the importance attached to brute force; malformed dwarfs, feeble in body but possessing uncanny mental powers that made even the giants tremble; and wizards who are in league with the mysterious powers of darkness. And, underlying all this stage machinery, there are the mediæval ideals of strength, courage, pride, and devotion. Such tales as the *Chanson de Roland* were enormously popular in France in the Middle Ages, and their popularity spread to England in Anglo-Norman times. In the direct line of descent from them we have Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. These metrical romances are simple, direct, and familiar in treatment. The poet

has a wide range in metre from which he may suitably choose, and no device is out of place that will help to give his verse a musical lilt.

As Professor Moulton points out, we have in the old ballad three elements—speech, song, and action. The speech element developed gives us the epic ; the song element the lyric ; and gesture the drama, with which we have now to deal.

A good story-teller would naturally endeavour to throw himself into the part of the hero, and so would pass by easy stages from narrator to actor. In the same way the story-writer would tend to lose his detachment, and to identify himself with his hero so that he appeared to tell his own story. Thus a great body of dramatic literature has arisen in which it is the writer's concern to present one or more characters each speaking for himself. All the forms that we have noticed become dramatic when this self-effacement takes place on the part of the writer so that the reader is left alone with the hero. The ordinary lyric, for instance, becomes a dramatic lyric when, as in Robert Browning's *Boot and Saddle*, the Cavalier sings his rollicking song and is gone ; and the ballad becomes a dramatic story in Matthew Arnold's *Forsaken Merman* or Browning's *How they Brought the Good News*. From these varieties, which are intended to be read, we pass to the regular stage-play, which is designed to be acted in a theatre, and so places the author yet one more remove from the hearers.

It is noteworthy that all the old literatures show a neglect of and contempt for the common people. We read of gods and heroes, knights and squires ; but, with a few notable exceptions, the masses are inarticulate. It has been left to comparatively recent times to discover

the plain man and to give expression to his feelings. This has opened up a vast territory and given literature a new inspiration, the effect of which it is impossible to estimate. We now see that in the humblest life there is the epic struggle, the romantic adventure, and the dramatic situation. The trappings so dear to the heart of chivalry are after all but stage properties. There is a man behind the plough as well as on the richly caparisoned steed, and the general realization of this truth has opened up a vast new field to the modern writer.

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

In his masterly introduction to *The Poems of Shakespeare* George Wyndham refers to the suggestiveness of lyrical poetry. The poet crystallizes a fleeting thought or a passing mood, but in such a way as to call up other thoughts and moods. The particular suggests the general, and so gives voice, not to an isolated moment, but to all time. The lyrics of Shelley are made the subject of a delightful essay in Stopford Brooke's *Studies in Poetry*. Watts-Dunton's *Poetry and the Renascence of Wonder* and Newbolt's *New Study of English Poetry* may be consulted for further information concerning the varieties of stanza-form. Each of the main literary forms is the subject of a volume to itself in Dent's "Channels of English Literature" series. There are references to the characteristics of ballad poetry in Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, and in Chesterton's *Browning*, p. 145. In W. J. Long's *History of English Literature* there is an interesting chapter on *Beowulf*, while that poem and the epic-form generally are ably treated in *The Epic* by Lascelles Abercrombie.

EXERCISES

1. Comment upon the appropriateness of the verse-form in *Paradise Lost*, Shelley's *A Lament*, Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, Browning's *Andrea del Sarto*, Hardy's *Dynasts*, and Tennyson's *Princess*.

2. Wyke Bayliss says, "Whether it is Dante . . . or Dickens, whether we move in a great arc with the stars or are tethered in the narrowest field—the circumference of our circle will always bear the same ratio to its radius." Enlarge upon this idea, taking illustrations from modern literature.

3. Mention any books of verse that you consider would have been better written in prose. Give reasons.

4. Show how the modern ballad differs from the old, taking *Sir Patrick Spens* and Campbell's *Lord Ullin's Daughter* as examples.

5. Stopford A. Brooke says, "When a lyric rises into form in a great poet, it is always in fire that it rises. But the temperament of the poet conditions the mode of the fire. It is for the most part a short-lived fire, but it burns more quietly in some, as in Wordsworth; more hotly in others, as in Byron; with every kind of intensity in various poets. In Shelley it burns slowly for a time, then flares to heaven in a rush of flame, then sinks and dies as swiftly as it flamed." Illustrate this passage from your own reading.

CHAPTER IX

HARMONY AND PROPORTION

> Fine proportion always seems to have grown up naturally; it shows none of the difficulties that have been painfully overcome, none of the snares of annoyance that have been skilfully avoided. R. A. M. STEVENSON

NO writer can hope to achieve greatness who has not a nice sense of proportion that will tell him where to begin and when to stop; where ornament is beautiful and where it would be a gratuitous excrescence; when plainness is essential to the telling delivery of his message and when severity would be repellent. This from the reader's point of view needs no demonstration, but we are apt to forget the corollary that a similar discrimination is just as necessary to the reader himself. If he is to exercise sound judgment he must be able to adjust his standards proportionately. We do not place a prize cauliflower and a rare orchid in the balances and estimate their relative values according to weight, yet we are not always innocent of like absurdities in literary matters. Judged by weight of learning, the delicate blossom of a Shakespearean sonnet or of an essay of Elia would look pitifully insignificant by the side of the massive solidity of the *Novum Organum* or the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Judged by breathless movement and the tax imposed upon a reader's power of concentration, Sir Walter Scott may have to bow to Baroness Orczy. The reader has to decide, however, not whether this

book has more learning or more movement than that, but whether its learning or its movement is proportionate to the aim which the writer has set before him—a matter which is much more difficult, and therefore is commonly neglected.

Length is the first and most obvious way in which proportion shows itself. A long work gives the impression of strength and a weighty, dignified theme; one that is very short conveys the idea of a flying fancy captured on the wing, an airy, insubstantial thought almost too delicate for utterance. So we may admire both Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Shelley's *Lines to an Indian Air* because the length of each is proportionate to the task attempted by the writer. Both Mercury and Hercules are beautiful, though in different ways. Nothing, however, is more tedious than a long book on a slight subject, and nothing is more unsatisfactory than the sketchy, irresponsible treatment of a noble theme.

All that has to be said about the necessity of proportion in the length of the whole work applies in equal measure to the length of its several parts, from book, chapter, or canto down to the sentence or line. A prolix opening by a writer who cannot get away cleanly from the mark and a hurried conclusion by one who has grown weary of his task and is anxious to banish it from sight are equally reprehensible. In those tiresome early chapters of *Waverley* and the unsatisfactory *dénouement* of *Woodstock* we have examples. Scott will also, as W. H. Hudson points out, write "pages of description about an occurrence that leads nowhither, or a character who forthwith drops into a second or third place." All these are offences against proportion. As for sentence-length, the short, chopping sentences in which Hazlitt describes

the fight between Bill Neate and the Gasman, or Charles Reade pictures Gerard's escape from the mill, are certainly proportionate to tense moments and rapid action. No less congruous, however, are the long and flowing periods in which George Borrow relates how he wandered along highways and byways as if all time were at his disposal.

But length is by no means the sole consideration. Form and appropriateness of detail next claim attention. We do not complain because the atmosphere of devotion is wanting in a kiosk, nor do we expect to find sweetmeats exposed for sale in a cathedral. In the same way, grinning gargoyles on the one would offend the eye just as fretwork decked out in cream and gold would seem tawdry in the other. Macaulay's assertive manner is in keeping with the events of the Glorious Revolution no less than the quaint, whimsical touches of Lamb are suited to Mrs Battle's opinions on whist. The homeliness of E. V. Lucas when he expatiates on the subject of wood-fires is as appropriate as the dignity of Gibbon in describing the fall of the Roman Empire. When, however, Macaulay wastes his hammer-blows upon the unfortunate Mr Robert Montgomery the want of proportion is painfully evident. Then the minuteness of detail must be considered together with the writer's aim and the space at his disposal. The scene-painter's technique differs from that of the painter of miniatures ; so, in selecting details for a sketch or short story, an author will pursue a very different method from that which he would follow within the wider bounds of a full-length novel. A short story is by no means a novel cut down, as a glance at some of the best work of Kipling and Tolstoy will show. Details have to be selected for

their significance. Every touch must tell. On such a restricted canvas there is no room for flourishes or tentative strokes. Closely connected with the selection of detail is the question of accuracy. Here again we have to take the main purpose into consideration. It would certainly be disproportionate for a writer of fiction to spend time in verifying relatively unimportant details that he might have used in bringing out the main idea. Shakespeare's work is full of anachronisms, but its greatness remains because it is truly proportionate. It lifts us out of a world of petty and accidental details into wider spaces where the only details that matter are laughter and tears, the bitterness of hate and the balm of kindness. We cease to care whether the Jews of Venice wore a distinctive garb, or whether there were clocks in Julius Cæsar's time, but we do feel more powerfully than ever the poignancy of the never-ending tale of human wrong, and the solace and eternal freshness of mirth.

Gradation too is a matter of proportion. Sometimes the lights and shadows are clearly defined, so that the subject stands out in bold relief. At others a softer outline, a mere suggestion, and a touch of mystery are more suitable. Dante, measuring everything with scrupulous exactness, leaves little to the imagination. " When he enters the Earthly Paradise he takes his bearings by the sun, observes the direction and force of the prevailing winds, and questions Matilda about grain and water-supply as if he were a staff-captain finding billets for a brigade of cavalry." Macaulay in a famous passage has contrasted Dante's precision with the " dim intimations " of Milton, yet very different from both of these is the mystery of

Magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn,

or of

Ancestral voices prophesying war !

Nevertheless all are, in their varying ways, beautiful, because they are proportionate.

Yet another phase is found in regularity of rhythm. The tribute paid to the ' faultlessness ' of Pope has carried with it the implication that writers who have employed a less uniform rhythm are faulty to that extent. As a matter of fact, mechanical regularity may be as disproportionate as the restless turbulence that can brook no law. Alexander Pope is often as great an offender in this respect as Walt Whitman. " There is," as Byron wisely said, " no beauty without some strangeness in the proportions." And there is little to be said for the prosodist who seeks to classify every beautiful line and would dub ' aberrations ' all those examples that will not fit in with his scheme. Such lines as

As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,

or

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd,

will not admit of the conventional scansion, it is true, but they are certainly not aberrations. Ruskin has praised the courage of the builder of the Doges' Palace in Venice in refusing to sacrifice comfort and convenience so as to secure a conventionally symmetrical row of windows; and a good writer will be equally resolute in declining to spoil the sense of his verse for the sake of preserving the regularity of his iambics.

In no way is the artist's skill shown more clearly than in his use of the materials at his disposal. The good

craftsman is as a rule careful even to niggardliness in this matter. He will not pass an unnecessary line, nor use a superfluous epithet. That Beethoven's melodies are so simple, and that he was so economical in the use of musical material, does not detract from the value of his work, but rather enhances it. And the stark simplicity and concentration seen in the work of Thomas Hardy and in the later poems of Yeats, to mention but two of the moderns, strengthen their work greatly. Milton's famous " blind mouths," in *Lycidas,* is a good example of concentration and economy. Meredith provides us with instances on every page of his poems, as when he asks

Was ever such virago morn ?

Indeed, he carried concentration to the point of obscurity, and so lost touch with proportion in that way. When he speaks of the Fates withholding " their starry more " we feel that extreme parsimony in the use of words has resulted in the sacrifice of lucidity. No such objection can be made concerning the account of the restoration of sight to the blind man at the Pool of Siloam (John ix). It is an outstanding example of word-economy, yet nothing could be clearer. Every word comes with biting emphasis ; there is nothing superfluous.

Disproportion arising from too much recurrence and not enough contrast will produce an effect of vagueness and flatness. Too much change, and exaggerated contrasts, on the other hand, will result in caricature and the grotesque. Both extremes are bad when they are accidental, but done competently, and of set purpose, they can be made most effective. We have an excellent instance of intentional vagueness in Tennyson's

> On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
> Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

These lines tell of the passing into the unknown of a valiant leader—the leader of a lost cause—and the sorrowing knight is left to ask where and why in vain. The same device is responsible for the terrible grandeur of some of the strongest passages in *Paradise Lost*, and no writer has used it with greater power than Edgar Allan Poe in such a poem as *The Conqueror Worm*. Akin to it is the reticence of true pathos. Every normal person feels this in the presence of death or extreme sorrow. There is no desire to go into details at such times. Words fail. Much is thought, but little can be said with adequacy or grace. Thus it is that the torrent of words with which little Paul Dombey is ushered out of this world is felt to be repellent and unconvincing, while the superb reticence of the account of George Osborne's death at Waterloo makes even the most hardened reader gulp down a sob :

> No more firing was heard at Brussels—the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city ; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart.

Dickens's gift for emphasizing salient features made him, however, one of our greatest humorists. For while pathos is the blotting out of all details by some overmastering loss or sorrow, humour is produced by the Puckish insistence upon detail to the exclusion of all ideas of normal relationship. We are so struck with a man's squint that he is, for us, all squint and nothing else, or the size of his nose so impresses us that we regard him not as a man, but as a perambulating nose. So Mr Gradgrind is square, and Mr Toots is for ever blushing and saying,

" Oh, it is of no consequence." We never see Mrs Gummidge without hearing that she is a " lone lorn creetur," while Mr Jarndyce is always casting apprehensive glances eastward.

Such caricature is an expression of individuality, and as such is far truer than conventional portraiture in which the retouching pencil has been fatally busy to the destruction of all those peculiarities that mark out one man from a thousand. One of the chief troubles of modern life is that men are apparently so much alike that we don't know a scoundrel when we see one. We should have no difficulty, however, in recognizing Daniel Quilp—the dwarf with a head large enough for a giant. Nor should we need instructions to avoid Monsieur Rigaud, whose " moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache, in a very sinister and cruel manner." With a good man like Mr Jarndyce such caricature is a compliment. The peculiarity upon which his creator dwells with loving insistence endears him to us all. With a bad man like Mr Pecksniff it is a flaming advertisement advising all and sundry of his real nature.

Yet another stage is reached when a writer of nonsense like Edward Lear or Lewis Carroll breaks free from all conventions and makes a new world. The satirical humorists, such as Aristophanes and Rabelais, Swift and Dickens, keep the main proportions true for a very obvious reason. A man may have ordinary eyes and legs, but very large ears. It is just because his legs and eyes are in the customary proportions that we are able to notice the enormity of his ears. When, however, we are taken to the " lands where the Jumblies live " we are in a new world in which all our former standards of eyes

and ears fail to apply. We can only place ourselves at the mercy of our guide, and let him do with us what he will. As G. K. Chesterton in his acute *Defence of Nonsense* shows, a satirical humorist like Dickens caricatures because there is something that he greatly hates or loves ; something that he would fain wipe out of existence, or something that is so dear that he cannot make enough of it. But nonsense humorists like Lear and Carroll sigh for another world, totally unlike this, into which they may retreat at will, a Never-never Land where our tiresome proportions do not hold at all.

The disproportion that is at the root of all humour is reflected in the forms which it usually takes. An insignificant or commonplace object is given an imposing and high-sounding name. Dickens calls a horse a " tall quadruped," which, he also says, displayed " great symmetry of bone." Later on the same " tall quadruped evinced a decided inclination to back into the coffee-room window." Again, he wishes to tell us that a horse, after going round and round, went back to his home, but he prefers to say that the animal " exchanged the rotatory motion in which he had previously indulged, for a retrograde motion." In the same vein George Eliot says, " You refrain from any lacteal addition, and rasp your tongue with unmitigated bohea," and Gray soberly asks Father Thames :

> Who foremost now delight to cleave,
> With pliant arm, thy glassy wave ?
> The captive linnet which enthral ?
> What idle progeny succeed
> To chase the rolling circle's speed,
> Or urge the flying ball ?

Repetition is another favourite device. The author

playfully isolates one particular feature and dwells upon it with a persistence that has no relation to the importance which a matter-of-fact view would give it. Here again we may quote Dickens :

> The pastrycook is hard at work in the funereal room in Brook Street, and the very tall young men are busy looking on. One of the very tall young men already smells of sherry, and his eyes have a tendency to become fixed in his head, and to stare at objects without seeing them. The very tall young man is conscious of this failing in himself ; and informs his comrade that it's his ' exciseman.' The very tall young man would say excitement, but his speech is hazy.

There are other types of humour based upon the accidental or wilful association of dissimilar ideas, as in the type of pleasantry represented by " Miss Nipper shook her head and a tin-canister," and in the familiar play on words known as the pun. In the latter instance meaning is deliberately sacrificed to form. Two ideas are confused because they happen to find expression in words that are similar in sound, as when the Prince of Wales met Falstaff upon the battle-field at Shrewsbury :

> *Prince.* I prithee, lend me thy sword.
> *Fal.* Nay, before God, Hal, if Percy be alive, thou gettest not my sword ; but take my pistol, if thou wilt.
> *Prince.* Give it me. What ! is it in the case ?
> *Fal.* Ay, Hal ; 'tis hot, 'tis hot : there's that will sack a city. [*The* PRINCE *draws out a bottle of sack.*
> *Prince.* What ! is 't a time to jest and dally now ?
> [*Throws it at him and exit.*

" O dear discretion, how his words are suited ! " exclaims Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice,* out of patience with Launcelot's exhibition of verbal gymnastics. He continues :

> The fool hath planted in his memory
> An army of good words ; and I do know
> A many fools, that stand in better place,
> Garnish'd like him, that for a tricksy word
> Defy the matter.

Lorenzo could rhapsodize in the moonlight, but when it was a prosaic affair like preparing for dinner he preferred a man that could " speak plain and to the purpose." In the broader and more obvious types of humour, such as these we have been considering, the disproportion is plain enough, but in the subtler and more delicate forms it is artfully veiled and will not reveal itself to all comers. It is always there, nevertheless, and its subtlety and unexpectedness add to its charm.

It is, as we have seen, the root paradox of literature, and, indeed, of all art whatsoever, that in order to secure the unity which is essential there must be contrast. Extremes apparently irreconcilable must be harmonized, and in this harmony lies what is at once the prime glory and the main difficulty of literary and artistic effort. The flat and monotonous reiteration of a theme can give neither light nor inspiration. We are stunned by too much emphasis ; we fail to catch tones that are too subdued. But when a few strident notes succeed a soft passage, or a hush follows a fanfare of trumpets, then the contrast seems deeply significant and we listen. So we learn that everything is relative. We have no absolute ideas. There would be no noise were there no quiet. Night follows day and is essential to it. Vice is never so evil as when placed by the side of virtue. So change is the light by which we behold that which is stationary. The oncoming night not only gives us knowledge of itself, but brings also a revelation of day.

In the same way it is not until one is safely in harbour that the full fury of the storm is realized.

But changes and contrasts must be harmonious ; they must enhance unity and not destroy it. Where there is not this harmony there is incongruity and discord. We should feel that discord were Private Mulvaney, for example, to use the rich vocabulary of Sir Thomas Browne, or Charles Darwin to break forth into luscious Eastern imagery. Harmonious contrast creates, but discordant contrast destroys. By the one our impressions are built up and strengthened ; by the other they are no sooner set up than they are knocked down again like so many ninepins. The musician knows this full well. That is why so many compositions are based upon what has been humorously termed the ' musical sandwich.' A theme is stated, to be followed by a contrasting theme in another key, and then a return is made to the first theme. Not until we have heard the contrasting theme are we able to realize the primary one completely, and not till we return to that in the third part do we appreciate the contrast itself. It is this unity wrought out of diversity that gives art its significance, making every effort, whether it be a lyric, a symphony, or a frieze, a type of that great process by which all things are being ordered to one end. All the lesser harmonies of fitting word and appropriate form are but part of that great harmony. This has been happily expressed by Sir William Watson in those familiar lines from *England my Mother*:

> Trees in their blooming,
> Tides in their flowing,
> Stars in their circling,
> Tremble with song.

God on His throne is
Eldest of poets :
Unto His measures
Moveth the Whole.

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

For the necessity of balance and proportion in prose-fiction, whether short story or full-length novel, see Hudson's *Introduction to the Study of Literature*, p. 179. Brewster deals with the same point in his *Writing of English*, ch. iii. The comparison between Milton and Dante is worked out at length in Macaulay's *Essay on Milton*. Comments on George Meredith's concentration and a useful introduction to his poetry will be found in G. M. Trevelyan's *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith*. The grotesque is a congenial subject with G. K. Chesterton ; reference may be made to his studies of Browning and Dickens, and also to the volume of essays entitled *The Defendant*. Lafcadio Hearn refers at some length to Poe's intentional vagueness in *Interpretations of Literature*, vol. ii, p. 164. For the distinction between caricature and exaggeration see Mrs Meynell's essay on Dickens in *Hearts of Controversy*. As for puns and the art of punning, what greater authority can be had than Charles Lamb ? Examples and delightful hints on the theory of the subject are plentifully besprinkled over the pages of his letters. Poe makes some wise comments on Hood's puns in *Marginalia*, clxxviii. St Paul's farewell to the Ephesians (Acts xx, 36), Christ's apostrophe to Jerusalem (Matt. xxiii, 37), and the death of Lazarus (John xi, 35) may be cited as examples of the reticence of true pathos.

EXERCISES

1. Say whether you consider the length of the following books to be proportionate, and give reasons for the differences :

(*a*) Carlyle's *Life of Sterling* and *Frederick the Great.*
(*b*) Gibbon's *Autobiography* and *Decline and Fall.*
(*c*) Milton's *Paradise Lost* and sonnet *On his Blindness.*
(*d*) Macaulay's *Essay on Milton* and *History of England.*

2. Give three examples of books with tedious openings, and offer suggestions for their improvement. Do the same for three books with huddled or otherwise unsatisfactory conclusions.

3. Justify the variation in sentence-length in these passages from *The Cloister and the Hearth* :

> It was past the middle of the fifteenth century ; Louis XI was sovereign of France ; Edward IV was wrongful king of England ; and Philip ' the Good,' having by force and cunning dispossessed his cousin Jacqueline, and broken her heart, reigned undisturbed this many years in Holland, where our tale begins.

> Gerard hung in mid-air. He clenched his teeth, and nipped the rope tight with his feet and gripped with his hands, and went down slowly hand below hand. He passed by one huge rough stone after another. He saw there was green moss on one. He looked up and he looked down. The moon shone into his prison window : it seemed very near. The fluttering figures below seemed an awful distance. It made him dizzy to look down : so he fixed his eyes steadily on the wall close to him, and went slowly down, down, down.

4. Comment on the amount of detail used in portraying the following characters, saying whether you think it proportionate in each case to the author's purpose : Bassanio and Gratiano ; Cassius and Decius Brutus ; Sam Weller and Mr Wardle's Fat Boy.

5. Describe briefly the characteristic features of the humour of each of the following : Mrs Malaprop, Falstaff, Mrs Poyser, Sam Weller, Touchstone, Handy Andy, Tom Sawyer, and J. J. Meldon.

CHAPTER X

STORY AND SETTING

> For my part, I liked a story to begin with an old wayside inn where, "towards the close of the year 17—," several gentlemen in three-cocked hats were playing bowls. R. L. STEVENSON

THE love of a good story well told is the link that binds old and young, rich and poor, aboriginal savage and exponent of modern culture. A tale, as Sir Philip Sidney says, "holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner." Under its spell we are carried away to distant lands, or lose ourselves in the morning mists of history. Certainly there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the widespread passion for a story, though that is often regarded as a sign of decadence. While we may feel bound to register our dissatisfaction with the schoolboy gloating over his 'blood,' the factory-girl revelling in her cheap novelette, and the lady of fashion demanding the very latest fiction at the circulating library, at the same time we must take care not to condemn them upon wrong grounds. We cannot censure them merely because they devour stories so eagerly, for the love of a story is a perfectly good and natural instinct. The schoolboy craves for excitement; the factory-girl desires a means of escape from mean and sordid surroundings; and the lady of fashion, devoured with *ennui*, wants something to make the time pass more easily. Literature, however,

is not merely a drug or a means of escape, and a story that satisfies these requirements and no more is bad, just as a popular tune that appeals only to the emotions is bad. But it does not follow that all the stories and tunes that happen to be popular are necessarily bad. It is not so much that the readers to whom we have referred are on wrong lines as that they have not gone far enough. They are not bad readers because they love the excitement of a complicated plot, but neither are they good readers unless they enjoy much more than that. And no story can claim to be good that does not give them the 'much more.' All the characteristics that we have been considering in previous chapters should be there, and the discerning reader will not miss them. Sir Walter Raleigh says that the Elizabethan audience asked for bloodshed and Shakespeare gave them *Hamlet*, and certainly all great and true stories are alike in that they give the readers more than they ask. For this reason we are advised to read the best of the Waverley novels at least six times, so that after we have satisfied our curiosity concerning the course of the plot we may have leisure to observe other less compelling but not less important features of Scott's work. The old stories that have been handed down to us from past ages have survived by virtue of the 'something more' beyond the mere thrill of incident. This is equally true of the tale which Jotham told the men of Shechem, of the thousand and one stories with which the Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid was entertained, and of the amazing repertory of Homer.

The telling of a story, if we may take that term in its broadest sense, is implicit in all forms of art, and our appreciation of any particular work of art is to be measured by our understanding of the story that is there

unfolded. Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, the *Laocoön*, a portrait by Rembrandt, and *Kubla Khan* all have stories to tell. If through the artist's inefficiency, or, as is more probable, through our own obtuseness, we fail to grasp the story, then that work of art can have little meaning for us. As a rule, we shelter ourselves behind an alleged lack of skill in the artist, or if his reputation be so firmly established that we dare not do that for fear of having our own judgment called in question, then we assume the understanding that we do not possess and praise where others praise. In most cases it would be wiser for us to practise humility and humbly to confess our lack of insight.

If a story makes its appeal by sacrificing fidelity and proportion, it is false and pernicious. That is not to say that a romance may not be far-fetched. The writer may make it as extravagant as he pleases. He says at the beginning "Let it be granted," and we are then prepared to grant him anything. But we in turn have a right to demand that he shall not exceed the limits laid down by his own postulates. He may choose whatever scale suits his purpose when planning his story, but having made his choice he must abide by it. There is no harm in reading of a country where the dukes habitually marry the dairymaids, but if an English dairymaid is set for ever looking round the corner for a duke to come and marry her, then bitter disappointment is likely to be the result. Similarly, it will not do a boy any harm to read of the wonderful exploits of the personage who hides his mysterious identity behind the numerals '999,' if the boy be not led to think that he can with advantage emulate those exploits in his own small circle. There must be some of the salt

of reality as well as the sugar of fancy and sentiment, and as a set-off to the thrill of unbounded excitement there must be the less demonstrative strain of consideration for others. The story, that is to say, should give some evidence of thought on the part of the writer, and so appeal to the thoughtful side in the reader. The emotions are not all, and the story which would have us think so is fundamentally false.

Harm is also caused by the reader's claim to have everything done for him. All must be explicit. He resents being left either to read between the lines, or to bridge gaps with the aid of his own imagination. We have already emphasized the truth that the reader's part is never passive. There should be that wholesome reciprocity between reader and writer by which the work of the one finds something like adequate interpretation in the experience of the other. But this presupposes a certain fitness of mind on the reader's part that is too often wanting. In that is found the key to the whole problem of literary appreciation. And in that also is the secret of the disproportionate influence of many writers whose work could by no accepted or acceptable canons entitle them to such eminence. Wordsworth knew the common attitude well enough, and in giving an account of Simon Lee, the old huntsman, he pauses to say :

> My gentle Reader, I perceive
> How patiently you've waited,
> And now I fear that you expect
> Some tale will be related ;

and then he adds :

> O Reader ! had you in your mind
> Such stores as silent thought can bring,

O gentle Reader ! you would find
A tale in every thing.
What more I have to say is short,
And you must kindly take it :
It is no tale ; but, should you think,
Perhaps a tale you'll make it.

The real story is not so much within the covers of a book as in the mind of the reader. In one sense the writer merely provides the raw material : all depends upon the correct use of it, and that rests with the reader. Certainly, among the best of all stories are those which we make for ourselves in silent thought, or construct from suggestions that are thrown out to us. The tendency of modern art is to leave more and yet more to be done by the individual. The artist merely hints and suggests.

But, to return to the story as we commonly understand it, we see that there are in it two elements—' plot ' and ' character.' There can be no story without movement, either expressed or implied ; nor can there be any without the human interest that character gives. In real life the difficulty is that there is neither beginning nor ending to any particular event. Charles I was executed, but to say that this was caused by the order of the tribunal over which John Bradshaw presided, and that the result was the Commonwealth, is merely to play with the question. Our lack of knowledge alone prescribes the limits to our inquiries in either direction. Added to this there is the difficulty which arises from the multitude of complications and interferences. The separate strands in the tangled web of human affairs are well-nigh impossible to trace. " None of us liveth to himself." It is true that a partisan may pass summary judgment, but one who desires to be fair and true finds it very hard

to decide how much Charles influenced others, and to what extent others influenced him. And the movement never ceases : we ourselves are part of it. That brings us to the personal factor. The observer himself has predilections and prejudices from which it is hard to escape, however much he may desire to do so. All kinds of unconscious influences bias his judgment. It is difficult, too, for him to take long views. He himself is but a creature of a day and must judge accordingly.

All this makes history and biography singularly complicated and extremely fascinating, but would render a story, as we understand it, impossible. Therefore the writer makes a definite beginning and ending for himself. He decides upon his first cause and his conclusion. Then he proceeds to cut off interfering circumstances and awkward complications. He simplifies the problem just as lights are regulated in a painter's studio. He makes himself a god, able to survey the whole problem and pass judgment. It is as if he were master of all time and had leisure to survey the completed work. So in fiction we have movement, but it is frozen or crystallized; or perhaps we may better compare it to a gramophone record that may be put on at will. Charles Lamb expresses a feeling that comes at times to all of us when we are overpowered with the endless and unceasing procession of events. " He would fain," he said, " lay an ineffectual finger upon the spoke of the great wheel." This desire is, to some extent, satisfied in a story. The traffic of humanity is for a short time held up, and we are able to take stock of it.

It is interesting to note that H. G. Wells inveighs against Henry James because he " has never discovered that a novel isn't a picture . . . that life isn't a studio."

He proceeds to demonstrate that James made the mistake of regarding a novel as a work of art that must be judged by its oneness, whereas the novel must follow life in being various and discursive. James and those like him are careful to select, when they should be anxious to include. The realist, on the contrary, flatters himself that he is giving us a bit of true life in all its bewildering complexity. He is not afraid of ragged edges, nor does he mind in the least when he is accused of being inartistic. He forgets, however, that he is as dependent upon selection as ever Henry James was. What he gives us is, after all, a bit of life only, and why this particular bit more than any other ? It had to begin somewhere and end somewhere, whereas real life is an ever-flowing stream without beginning or ending. So that the realist's choice is as arbitrary and his work as artificial as that of the most conscious artist. It is clear that in electing to begin at a certain point he is prejudging the case. That is not to say that the open-air work of a realist has not many merits that are absent from the work of the artist in the studio. The world of letters is wide enough for both, and realism tends to become mischievous when it assumes an impartiality that it certainly does not possess.

Design in a story is as necessary as design in verse-form, and those who profess to regard fiction as a formless affair, quite free from laws of any kind, have not yet arrived at an understanding of the elements of the problem. The story-writer has to design his movement and select his events in the manner we have indicated, and this design is what we commonly know as ' plot.'

The movement need not necessarily take place while we watch. It may have preceded a selected moment, and we are spectators of the result. When, for instance,

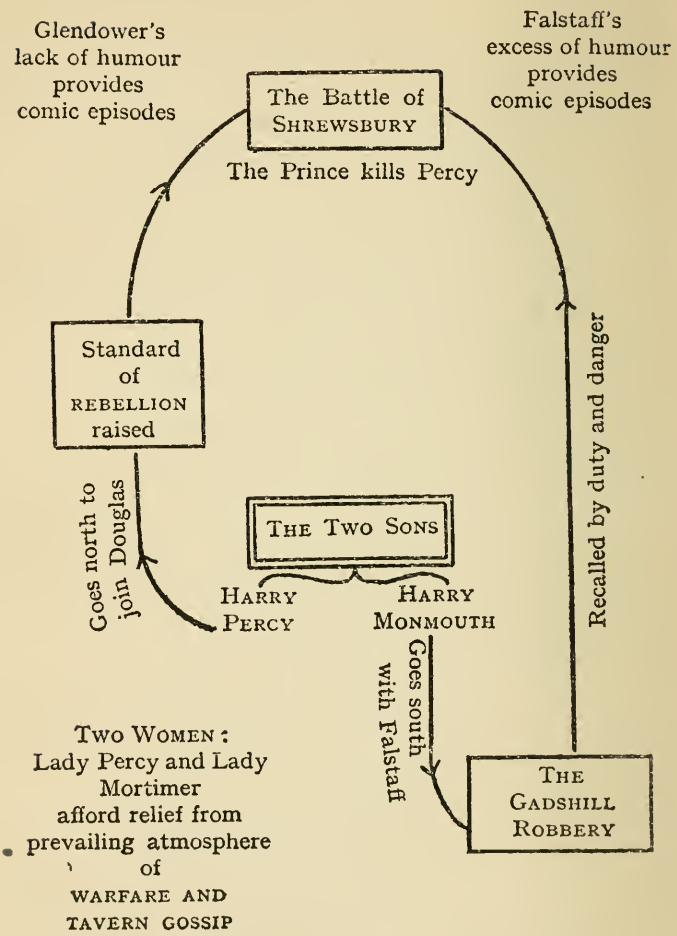
we see the Lotos-Eaters reclining on a flowery bank, our appreciation of their present position is largely conditioned by our knowledge of their recent experiences on the way. Or what we see may be the cause that shall lead the way to untold results, as when we watch Columbus placing his foot upon the shore of the New World. But in any case the movement is there, actual or implied. In the best Greek drama the bulk of the action took place off the stage, but what was seen and heard would have been impossible had there been no action.

The plot has no meaning, however, apart from the persons or 'characters' whom it affects, and the first lesson that we have to learn concerning character is that it is never stationary. Experimental psychologists are busy devising mind-measures, but a satisfactory measure of character remains to be found. We can only with very partial success judge one another, while to ourselves we remain insoluble mysteries. To all appearances the character of the man with whom we may be conversant is as fixed as the hour-hand of the clock, which gives no hint of movement as we gaze at it. Yet we know that the one is developing as surely as the other is moving, and it is the story-teller's business to demonstrate that development clearly. He has to show how Henry Durie, apparently the safest and steadiest of men, was forced by the unspeakable villainy of the Master of Ballantrae to stoop to the villain's level. He has to show two characters like Bassanio and Portia growing and expanding under adverse circumstances so as to command an admiration that would certainly never be theirs had they remained as they were when first we met them. The weak story-teller fails here. He gives us puppets, not

characters. As they were in the beginning, so they are to the end. There is the conventional hero with a marvellous *penchant* for getting into scrapes ; the distraught heroine whose tearful plight is hardly convincing ; and the villain who has made villainy a hobby. At the end there is still the hero, a bit of a fool who doesn't deserve his luck ; the heroine smiling through her tears ; and the villain, baffled, yet a villain still. Nothing has essentially changed.

We may perhaps the better appreciate the part played in all stories by these elements of plot and character if we look at one or two plot-diagrams. In 1 *Henry IV* we have the fundamental clash of characters in the contrast between the two sons, Harry Percy and Harry Plantagenet, which gives rise to the whole play. This contrast is accentuated when Percy goes north to join Douglas and plan the rebellion, while the Prince goes south to join Falstaff and play at highway-robbery. The result of the one is the raising of the standard of revolt : of the other the Gadshill robbery. So far all proceeds according to pattern, but the unexpected happens when the news of Percy's rebellion reacts upon the erring Prince and, at the urgent call of duty, he retraces his steps and goes to Shrewsbury. Now we see the two sons together, but more as two brave men fitly matched than as two contrasted characters, and Percy dies not unworthily after all at the hand of Prince Harry. A secondary contrast is provided by the characters of Glendower and Falstaff. The utter lack of a sense of humour of the one and the excessive and ill-timed sense of humour of the other both serve to provide those rollicking passages that make the play so delightful. Such is the movement and the character that make up the story. We might regard

PLOT-DIAGRAM OF "1 HENRY IV"



Falstaff as a psychological phenomenon, and prosecute elaborate inquiries into his past history so as to secure a logical and comprehensive explanation of the doings of this prince of humorists. Then Prince Henry's rather quixotic behaviour is not adequately accounted for by the likeness which he draws between himself and the sun, and we might seek further for possible causes. But Shakespeare encourages no such questions, and, indeed, it is idle to ask them, though it may provide good fun, as in the playful essay on Falstaff in *Obiter Dicta*. The author exercised his right of selection, and he also chose the scale on which the story is planned. So much being granted, the whole play works itself out accordingly. Once the premises are settled, the outcome is in a large measure out of the writer's control. When Little Nell died angry protests reached the author from all quarters, but he had no option in the matter. Inexorable circumstances had sealed Little Nell's fate, and for Dickens to have offered any other solution as a concession to weak sentimentalism would have been an outrage to fidelity. Some less judicious writers have yielded to popular clamour. Favourite characters have, with no matter what wrench to probability, been recalled to life, and the melancholy outcome of the resurrection remains in each case for a warning.

As You Like It gives us a story in which the chief interest would seem to be in character and not in plot. It is primarily a study in contrasts. There is the very vivid contrast in setting and its inevitable reaction on character. On the one hand there is the confined and luxurious atmosphere of the Court, breeding jealousy and discontent in evil natures, fondness and lax submission in those who are inclined to goodness. On the other

hand there is the free and wholesome discipline of the open air, inducing reconciliation and goodwill. The artificial light in the one causes distortion and a false perspective that cannot be corrected until all go out into the open and view themselves and their fellows in the broad light of day. This contrast, painful enough in itself, is reinforced by a number of character-contrasts. There are the two rulers, one easy-going, but a true philosopher when he loses his power ; the other greedy of place, but a prey to an uneasy conscience when he gets it. Round these are grouped a number of contrasting pairs, perhaps the most interesting being the two wits Jaques and Touchstone. The one is a professed cynic, passing for a wise man in the eyes of the world, but his wisdom is half folly. The other is an avowed fool to whom no one is expected to pay serious heed, but his folly is half wisdom. Most important of all, however, is the development of character which the play shows. The easy-going Duke Senior and the grasping Duke Frederick and the covetous Oliver all have to pass through the stern discipline of the forest. The trappings of circumstance are removed and a sense of essential values is secured, leading inevitably to restitution on the one hand and to a firmer grasp of responsibilities on the other.

Thus we see the importance of setting, a factor that no story-teller can afford to neglect. It may be sympathetic and in unison with the main idea, as in Matthew Arnold's *Forsaken Merman*, where, as hope gradually recedes and the truth dawns upon the Merman that Margaret will never return, the storm-clouds gather and the sea grows stormy. In Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, too, the old man Thenot, who is scorned by Cuddie, " telleth a tale of the Oak and the Brier, so

PLOT-DIAGRAM OF "AS YOU LIKE IT"

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

CONTRAST IN SETTING (reacting on character)

- Confined and luxurious atmosphere of COURT, breeding discontent and jealousy.
- Free discipline of OPEN AIR, inducing reconciliation and goodwill.

CHARACTER CONTRASTS

1. Two Rulers
   - Duke SENIOR, lax, but philosophic.
   - Duke FREDERICK, grasping, but the prey of conscience.
2. Two Brothers
   - OLIVER, covetous.
   - ORLANDO, naturally generous.
3. Two Wits
   - JAQUES the Cynic, his wisdom half folly.
   - TOUCHSTONE the Clown, his folly half wisdom.
4. Two Cousins
   - ROSALIND
   - CELIA

   Contrasting in disposition, united in affection.
5. Two Marriages
   - ORLANDO and ROSALIND.
   - TOUCHSTONE and AUDREY.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LAXITY of Duke Senior.

GREED and ENVY of Duke Frederick and Oliver.

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE FOREST

↓

Producing sense of true values, leading to restitution and firmer grasp of responsibilities.

lively, and so feelingly, as, if the thing were set forth in some Picture before our eyes, more plainly could not appear." And the tale is placed in a wintry setting, Spenser explains, " for as in this time of year, so then in our bodies, there is a dry and withering cold, which congealeth the curdled blood, and freezeth the weatherbeaten flesh with storms of Fortune and hoar frosts of Care." In the same way Tennyson enshrouds that last battle which Arthur fought, a hopeless struggle for a lost cause, in the confusion of an all-enveloping mist.

But the setting may be a contrast, so as to make the main theme stand out in sharp relief. Beautiful surroundings will strangely and unreasonably induce a feeling of sadness at times. Jessica, seated upon the moonlit bank at Belmont with Lorenzo, says pensively:

> I am never merry when I hear sweet music ;

and Shelley at Naples, when

> The sun is warm, the sky is clear,
> The waves are dancing fast and bright,
> Blue isles and snowy mountains wear
> The purple noon's transparent might,

gives us *Stanzas written in Dejection.* And for setting of the Ancient Mariner's tale of unredeemed solitudes and the great spaces of the sea we have the contrasting suggestion of the pleasant warmth and homely mirth of the wedding-feast. Now and again strains reach us from the merry throng, but they grow fainter and fainter, until at length all interest is absorbed in the main story. But the tale of that thoughtless deed and terrible expiation would not be what it is without the wedding-feast in the background.

It is a favourite device to represent man, whose days are so uncertain and full of trouble, as being set in a world of nature apparently unchanging and never-ending. Men desire, struggle, weep, and pray by turns, but Nature looks unconcernedly on. Before they came she was there : and there she will remain long after they are gone. As for her other creatures, if they take notice of the feverish strivings of man, it is only to mock at them. So Richard Jefferies looks at the pigeons fluttering about the portico of the British Museum, and then thinks of the doves that haunted the temples of Greece. Empires rise and fall ; systems of thought grow antiquated and are superseded ; but the birds " who have not laboured nor travailed in thought " ever possess the sunlight. In precisely the same way Keats addresses the nightingale as " immortal bird," and thinks of the long succession of all sorts and conditions of men that have listened to its song. With Henley it is the blackbird singing " Death is fleet, life is sweet " in the may, while the lovers keep their tryst, tarry a while, and then die. The blackbird also enters into George Meredith's touching picture of *Change in Recurrence*. There, too, are the squirrel and the " snail-tapping thrush," but one—the one to whom all these were so dear—is gone :

> I gazed : 'twas the scene of the frame,
> With the face, the dear life for me, fled.

Beginning and ending also take a special importance, giving a reminder of the days when stories were actually told. The narrator depended upon the opening sentences to arrest the attention of his hearers, and with the last he clinched the whole matter and gave the impression that he wished to remain with them. In written work also

the beginning may be made full of significance, as when Winston Churchill, in *The Inside of the Cup*, makes us listen to the church bells of New York on a Sunday morning. They have been silent through the week, and now their clanging tones are the more arresting. They represent the challenge which the religious world makes to the workaday world, so triumphant on one day, so ineffective on all the others. The workaday world, for its part, is quite content to let the bells ring out in clear supremacy on Sunday as long as the other six days are free from the domination of those principles for which the bells stand, and it is with this curious opposition that the book, thus begun, very vividly deals. If we continue to treat 'story' in its broadest sense, Shakespeare's beginnings provide a fruitful ground for study. The storm in *The Tempest* betokens the confusion, distress, and antagonism that can be reconciled only by youthful love. The sentry's challenge in *Hamlet* represents the irresistible questions put to those who have secured place and power to which they have no rightful claim. Leigh Hunt provides a good example of the evasive beginning. He announces a subject, *Getting up on Cold Mornings*, and proceeds to talk about a certain Italian poet who has written a poem on insects. We wonder what this can possibly have to do with the subject, and curiosity prompts us to read on—which is, of course, just what the author wishes us to do. He knows just how long he may safely hold us in suspense without sending us away in disgust. But one of the most effective of all beginnings must surely be the opening sentence of Bacon's essay *Of Truth*. "*What is Truth?* said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer."

Endings are no less significant. That last speech of

the penitent captain in Stevenson's *Ebb-Tide*, and the telling close of *Christmas at Sea*, already quoted; the touching sentence with which Motley concludes his *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, and the prayer which Chaucer offers at the close of the *Canterbury Tales* are very different modes of ending, but are alike in effectiveness. Andrew Lang has singled out the conclusion of *Sohrab and Rustum*. The old warrior, stung by the taunt that he was hoarding his fame, sallied forth in plain arms that no man might know him, and engaged, all unwittingly, in deadly combat with his own son Sohrab. Too late he made the fateful discovery, and there he sat alone with his grief:

> But the majestic River floated on,
> Out of the mist and hum of that low land
> Into the frosty starlight.

The grand final scene in which Dickens loved to group all his characters, and, after duly exposing the villain of the piece, to send him crushed and mortified to a just retribution, is not a happy method. Thackeray's brisk manner is better, and the last sentence of *Vanity Fair* is delightful, though it does the book an injustice. "Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out."

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

In his *Modern Study of Literature* Professor R. G. Moulton gives plot-schemes of *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, and Scott's *Monastery*. Note the setting in Meredith's *Love in the Valley*. In the course of it, as Mr G. M. Trevelyan points out in *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith*, we are taken through all the seasons of the farmer's year, and the

appreciation of this provides the key to the complete understanding of the poem. In *Our Mutual Friend* there are the river and the dust-heap, both full of significance, while in *The Old Curiosity Shop* we soon find ourselves on the Thames-side wharf that consorts so well with the sinister influence exercised throughout the book by Quilp, its owner. But one of the finest examples of appropriate setting in all literature is to be found in the Book of Job. We first meet Job at the feast—typical of the prosperity and joy that had hitherto been his lot. Then comes the news of a long succession of losses, each more overwhelming than that which preceded it, followed by a loathsome infliction, and Job "sat among the ashes." And on that ash-mound where, we are told, the outcast and beggar still sit outside Eastern villages the drama is played out to its conclusion.

EXERCISES

1. Ruskin lays down these principles for the painter of historical subjects: "Every figure which is unnecessary is an encumbrance. Every figure which does not sympathize with the action, interrupts it." Discuss the applicability of these rules to prose-fiction.

2. Make plot-schemes for a play of Shakespeare, a Waverley novel, and any modern novel that you have read.

3. Contrast the following from the point of view of character-development: Prince Henry (in *Henry IV*), Sydney Carton, Sir Percy Blakeney, Becky Sharp, and Portia (in *The Merchant of Venice*).

4. Comment upon the conclusions of the following: *Twelfth Night, The Tempest, Martin Chuzzlewit, The Newcomes, Maud.*

5. "All works of art tell a story." Show briefly how this is true, taking as examples a poem, a piece of sculpture, a building, and a musical composition.

CHAPTER XI

PERSONALITY AND STYLE

> We might as well say that one man's shadow is another's as that the style of a really gifted mind can belong to any but himself. It follows him about *as* a shadow. His thought and feeling are personal, and so his language is personal. J. H. NEWMAN

THAT quality which we term personality—the revelation of the man behind the book—marks all great literature. In the literature of modern times its significance is indisputable. It is possible for a practised reader to tell without much difficulty whether a given passage was written by Macaulay or Addison, Burke or Bunyan, Henry James or H. G. Wells. Or when he takes up Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* and compares Queen Katharine's trial scene with the passages in which she reproaches the two cardinals he is at once conscious of a striking difference. Both occur in a play which bears the name of Shakespeare ; but, as Sir Sidney Lee observes, " no reader with an ear for metre can fail to detect in the piece two rhythms, an inferior and a superior rhythm. Two pens were clearly at work." From one the ideas flow with such a rush that no conventional forms can contain them. Again and again the accepted canons suffer. The movement is rapid and the expression broken. The writer's white-hot imagination twists and changes the ordered arrangement of the sentences as molten lava will disturb and alter the rock-

masses through which it forces its way to the surface. What the other pen gives us is, on the contrary, calm and methodical. Emotion is kept well in hand, and is never allowed to overflow the bounds of the chosen metrical form. There are no wild flights of imagery, no bewildering turns of thought. The reader fails to catch the tones of Shakespeare in such a passage as this, with its unfailing regularity and conventional imagery :

> Alas ! poor wenches, where are now your fortunes ?
> Shipwreck'd upon a kingdom where no pity,
> No friends, no hope, no kindred weep for me ;
> Almost no grave allow'd me. Like the lily,
> I'll hang my head and perish.

Shakespeare may be the name upon the title-page, but the hand is the hand of John Fletcher. This, on the other hand, with its abruptness, its concentration, and the unconventionality of its imagery is the true voice of Shakespeare :

> O ! many
> Have broke their backs with laying manors on 'em
> For this great journey. What did this vanity
> But minister communication of
> A most poor issue.

Here, then, are two different styles reflecting two different personalities. It is not a question of superficial tricks and mannerisms, but a matter of essential individuality. So when Shelley, apostrophizing the West Wind, says,

> Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud !
> I fall upon the thorns of life ! I bleed !
>
> A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
> One too like thee : tameless and swift and proud,

he is giving us the key to the tragedy of his life and also

revealing the true significance of his work. The passage explains that eerie power of myth-making which makes Shelley stand out among our English poets. He not only saw the West Wind as a great being inhabiting vast spaces; he was himself, for the nonce, a being on the same gigantic scale, and possessed congruous attributes. And when the thorns of life lacerated him and roused him to a sense of the realities of prosaic existence, it was a sad and bitter disillusionment. Shelley wrote as he did because he was Shelley. His style was not a manner that he consciously assumed for a definite purpose, but a mode of expression that followed naturally and inevitably upon his own temperament. It is this inevitable quality of all true style that we are sometimes apt to forget, and Newman's metaphor of the shadow is particularly valuable because it emphasizes this truth. Style is something beyond the power of the man himself. He may control, improve, and develop it, but he can no more alter it essentially than he can change his personality. It is as impossible for a writer who is really expressing himself to drop his own style as it is for a man who is walking in the sun to dispense with his own shadow in favour of that of another man. Charles Lamb, keeping open house in that unpretentious garret in Inner Temple Lane, and revelling in the informal evenings spent there with a few congenial spirits, could write in no other way than in that intimate and whimsical fashion of his. And Macaulay, the orator, whose every sentence, we are told, "was perfectly devoured by the listeners" in the House of Commons, could express himself on paper only in that emphatic, antithetical manner that Brougham rather spitefully called "Tom's snip-snap."

It is true that one man may parody the style of another,

just as one may mimic the gait of another. This, however, is merely a bit of ingenious artistry where all the emphasis is placed upon the manner. Such an imitation differs from the original as the light of the moon differs from that of the sun. Fire a man's mind with a great idea, or make his imagination glow with a beautiful vision, and he will have no choice of style. Indeed, he will scarcely give it a thought : the idea or the vision will be all in all, and the manner of presenting it will depend upon the manner of man that he is. A clever parodist like J. C. Squire can take *The Lotos-Eaters*, for example, and transpose it into any style that he pleases. When he is writing *The Birds*, however, he has no choice of style. He does not stop to consider whether the work shall be done after the manner of Masefield or Byron : it has to be as Squire alone can write it, and therein lies its main value.

We may also observe the working of personality in the varying treatment of the same theme by two authors. Wordsworth's *Peter Bell* is a characteristic counterblast to Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, and each poem is a revelation of the man behind it. For Coleridge that which is bizarre and improbable alone brings with it any promise of romance. He has ceased to look for it in the humdrum surroundings of everyday life. So when he wishes to be wrapped in ecstasy he dreams of strange places where nothing is more natural than the supernatural, and the impossible is all-convincing. Thus the phantom ship is quite in keeping with such a scene as that which Coleridge pictures when, " without a breeze, without a tide," it

> drove suddenly
> Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars
(Heaven's Mother send us grace !)
As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
With broad and burning face.

Alas ! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she nears and nears !
Are those her sails that glance in the Sun,
Like restless gossameres ?

The reader shudders : his reasoning faculties and the common sense of which he is so proud are suspended, for the spell is upon him as surely as it was upon the unfortunate Wedding Guest. "The Mariner hath his will."

But Wordsworth's method is quite different. He purposely bids us stay at home in familiar scenes where all the customary sanctions hold and where it is not so easy to induce Reason to leave her throne. He does not seek to enslave us by the all-compelling glance of some mysterious seafarer, but confronts us with the prosaic picture of a hawker beating his donkey. There was, it would seem, little room for romance here :

At noon, when by the forest's edge
He lay beneath the branches high,
The soft blue sky did never melt
Into his heart ; he never felt
The witchery of the soft blue sky.

Yet from such unpromising material did Wordsworth seek to wring poetry, pathos, and romance. Instead of atmosphere and suggestion we are given realism and plain truths.

Or, again, Wordsworth's *Skylark* differs significantly from the vision that Shelley gives. The one characteristically praises the bird because it remains faithful to home

and to things of earth ; the other, with equal fitness, lauds it because it scorns the ground and leaves earth far behind. It is not so much the bird which either describes as himself.

Environment has something to do with the matter. The rugged and uncouth style of *Sartor Resartus* does not seem out of place when we remember that it was written in " the howling wilds of Craigenputtock." Scott's romantic youth in the Border Country at Sandyknowe, spent in listening to the tales of the shepherd through the day and to those of his grandmother at the evening fireside, is a natural prelude to the long procession of knights and ladies, minstrels and magicians, that crosses his pages. So also Wordsworth's solitary walks by the lakeside and over mountain paths are reflected in a style that is at once simple, bleak, and grand.

Even those mannerisms upon which captious critics are eager to fasten are valuable because they indicate personality. We learn to love a writer, warts and all, and when we hear a rousing voice declaiming, " Who, then, were mad but the Pallantids," or " Who, then, were astonished as those knights," we have no difficulty in recognizing the vigorous tones of Charles Kingsley. So the repetition of the word ' meantime ' betrays Motley ; the phrase ' no doubt ' shows Walter Pater's workmanship ; while a plentiful besprinkling of ' thither ' and ' generality ' on a page reveals the hand of George Borrow. Mr E. J. Payne, in a piece of acute criticism that deserves a better fate than to be tucked away in a preface to Burke's works, points out that writers have favourite epithets. With Shakespeare it is ' sweet ' ; with Burke it is ' great,' ' noble,' or ' liberal.' Milton is fond of the word ' bright,' while Jeremy Taylor has a natural liking

for 'eternal.' Kipling excites our curiosity with the phrase "But that is another story." Meredith is easily to be recognized by his queer inversions, such as "Else die we" and "Chimed they in one." Scott bursts upon us with a challenging rhetorical question: "Breathes there a man?" "Lives there a strain?" or else he favours the reader with superfluous explanations revealing an honest pride that is far removed from snobbery: "The Earl, for no less exalted was his station," or "'May Heaven,' said he, looking upward." Keats was fond of dew and shady springs and valleys, Wordsworth liked the open sea and bare uplands, Tennyson the lulling sound of falling water. A true reader takes pleasure in recognizing such personal touches even when they are so marked as to become failings.

There are, however, critics who deny that personality has any place in great literature. The business of the good writer, they say, is to eliminate it. He has to get rid of those individual eccentricities that separate him from the rest of humanity, and to emphasize all those qualities that proclaim a community of spirit with his fellows. When he learns to express, not those feelings and aspirations that are peculiar to himself, but those that are common to all, then, and not till then, he begins to write good and abiding literature. This seems at first sight a likely doctrine. The great topics of literature are certainly those happenings and experiences that make us all kin. Death, for instance, as the door through which we all must pass, bulks large on the pages of our books. We can no more escape it in our literature than in our daily life. But there are two ways of looking at death. We may regard it as the fate that dogs all existing things, or we may look upon it as a personal experience. As a

common phenomenon, robbed of the poignancy associated with personal suffering and loss, it never yet made a human heart beat the faster nor caused a single tear to flow. The statement that we all must die, on account of its very universality, comes home to nobody. As it is true of all created things there is no reason why one man should show concern more than another. It is like those home-thrusts in a sermon that each listener is zealously directing to his neighbour. But death as revealed in personality affects each individual reader. He hears the cry of despair wrung from the poor wretch who is shuddering on the brink, and he finds that he too is gazing timorously into the depths of the same chill stream. Or he watches the calm indifference with which the philosopher receives the dread visitant, and the sight braces his nerves; he feels that he also can be brave. Or, again, he sees one to whom life has brought nothing but disillusionment, and as he listens to the captive's cry for freedom he realizes that there are circumstances in which death would be welcome indeed. So he may turn to Claudio's terror-stricken appeal in *Measure for Measure*:

> Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
> To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
> This sensible warm motion to become
> A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
> To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
> In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
> To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
> And blown with restless violence round about
> The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
> Of those that lawless and incertain thoughts
> Imagine howling: 't is too horrible!
> The weariest and most loathed worldly life
> That age, ache, penury and imprisonment

Can lay on nature is a paradise
To what we fear of death.

Or he may read the more comfortable philosophy which is contained in Blanco White's famous sonnet :

Mysterious Night ! when our first parent knew
Thee from report divine, and heard thy name,
Did he not tremble for this lovely frame,
This glorious canopy of light and blue ?
Yet 'neath a curtain of translucent dew,
Bathed in the rays of the great setting flame,
Hesperus with the host of heaven came,
And lo ! creation widened in man's view.
Who could have thought such darkness lay concealed
Within thy beams, O Sun ! or who could find,
Whilst flow'r and leaf and insect stood revealed,
That to such countless orbs thou mad'st us blind !
Why do we, then, shun Death with anxious strife ?
If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life ?

Or he may listen with Keats to the rapturous song of the nightingale, until to him also

seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy !

There is something in his own breast that responds to all these different views of a great problem. Tell him of the fate that is common to all, and he remains unmoved : show him how it concerns a particular man or woman, and he is immediately touched ; a kinship is established, no matter how widely opinions may diverge. Love and life, death and sleep, and the other universal experiences that form the raw material of literature have neither meaning nor interest unless interpreted in personality, and the expression of that personality is style.

The element of personality, strong as it is in modern literature, would seem, however, to vanish completely when we come to consider that of more ancient times. Reference has already been made to that important transition when literature was first 'fixed' by being committed to writing. Before that time authorship had been collective, and private property in literary matter did not exist. The great mass of traditional literature was available for anyone who was sufficiently interested to appropriate it to himself, and possession by knowledge was indeed nine points of the law. The body of communal writing, touched and retouched by countless hands, is like a composite photograph in which it is quite useless to attempt to trace any individual lineaments. There is in it no individuality as we understand it. But to jump to the conclusion that there is also no personality in it is to assume too much. There is personality behind the composite photograph, although it is true that we are unable to refer the likeness to any particular person. Whatever difficulty there may be arises not from the lack, but from the excess of personality. So many individuals are involved that the common characteristics only are shown. So with the older literature. Each story-teller revealed his personality in the telling of his tale. The matter that was handed on was raw material merely, which he was free to edit and adapt at will according to his own ideas of what was necessary and fitting. It is true that few of the personal touches by which the story-teller impressed himself upon his audience have survived the transference from tradition to paper. Nevertheless we must not forget that communal literature is made up of the work of individual artists. They may be forgotten, but that does not alter the fact that their

work remains—the work of individuals. It is difficult now to trace with any degree of certainty the devices, once so potent, that held great crowds spell-bound; nor can we recognize the hands that lopped off much that was irrelevant and tedious, gradually bringing out the essential and the abiding into sharp relief, and giving the story something like a workmanlike shape. Yet those personal traits are there, and the traditional literature to which we owe so much could not exist without them. It is certainly a mistake to suppose that personality is a comparatively recent development. It has merely changed its appearance. Individual personality may not be reflected in communal literature, but we are bound to recognize in it the revelation of communal personality. The rugged outlines hacked out by the Northern craftsmen in their mythology are very different from the smooth and graceful contours swept by the hand of the Greek. Odin is characteristically unlike Zeus. The one is massive and mysterious; the other intelligible and almost companionable. So the tales of the East, with their fatalism, their delicious leisure, and their intricate richness of imagery, are not to be mistaken for those of the West, with their simple directness and rapidity. Races have a definite personality as expressed in language and literature. The great French critic Brunetière has shown us how fascinating it is to watch the development of this personality and to see how the mastery of the various forms has been acquired in successive literatures. History repeats itself here as elsewhere; the lonely figure of Lucretius reappears, with certain characteristic differences, in the equally lonely figure of Milton. The one showed that the Latin language could be made the vehicle of sustained thought

on a high plane : the other performed a similar service for English. But with all the fascination of tracing an undoubted likeness, it is necessary to stress the differences : Milton was so much more than an English Lucretius that we get the ever-recurring marvel of personality from yet another angle.

Ages too have a personality. The formal and impersonal mediæval literature is, as Professor Brett has pointed out, the natural expression of the mediæval schoolman's love of system and of his insistence on the universal. In the same way the philosophy of the Renaissance, with its sense of the importance of the will and the emotions, is reflected in Shakespeare and in the rise of the novel. And just as the artificiality and precision of the literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is the outcome of the growth of natural science, so the *vers libre* of contemporary poets, and the general impatience of form, is an apt expression of the spirit of revolt that is abroad to-day.

But there are those whom these things move not. They decry style as an evil thing. They sneer at the 'inevitable' word, and laugh at artistic 'effects.' Prominent among these are Samuel Butler, of *Erewhon* fame, and his very apt pupil George Bernard Shaw. The former says, for example, that he never knew a writer yet who took the smallest pains with his style and was at the same time readable. Taking the cue from him, Mr Shaw, in the preface to *Man and Superman*, calls style "a pleasant parlour game," and proceeds to assert that style is never achieved for its own sake. All that is necessary, we are told, is for a writer to have something to assert. "He who has nothing to assert has no style and can have none : he who has something to assert will

go as far in power of style as its momentousness and his conviction will carry him. . . . Your Royal Academician thinks he can get the style of Giotto without Giotto's beliefs, and correct his perspective into the bargain. Your man of letters thinks he can get Bunyan's or Shakespeare's style without Bunyan's conviction or Shakespeare's apprehension, especially if he takes care not to split his infinitives." Now it is characteristic of Mr Shaw to begin by making a startling assertion to tickle the fancy of the heterodox, and then to proceed to defend and elaborate it in such a way that he shows himself to be not very far from the orthodox position after all. When he states that the prime requisite for the Shakespearean style is a Shakespearean spirit, he is proclaiming a truth to which all thoughtful readers must subscribe. We can afford to overlook the gibe at " your men of letters," and even welcome the other exaggerations as likely to compel the attention of those who would probably ignore a quieter and more exact statement. It was well that the emphasis should be placed so strongly upon the cardinal virtue of sincerity, but it is no new doctrine, and it certainly did not originate with Butler or Shaw. When Butler says that " a man's style should be like his clothes, neat, well-cut, and such as not to call any attention to him at all," he is saying no more than has been said over and over again by despised men of letters. Indeed, if we must choose, Newman's metaphor of the shadow seems truer and more apt, because it brings out the very point that Mr Shaw has stressed, namely, that style to be worth anything at all must be perfectly natural. But natural powers may be cultivated or neglected. When Robert Louis Stevenson " played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Words-

worth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire, and to Obermann " he was playing no " pleasant parlour game." He was serving a hard and necessary apprenticeship to the craft of letters, and forging a style which was to become one of the most sincere and individual things in our literature. He, like any other healthy-minded man, did not take those efforts too seriously. He called them " monkey tricks." But, on the other hand, he knew better than to be ashamed of them. A time came when his instrument was perfect ; when he could forget both it and himself in his message. Then, when he ceased to think about style, he first began to produce it. When he forgot to be anxious about himself he first began truly to express himself.

And with so many different personalities all engaged in self-expression there will naturally be a multiplicity of varying styles. With some it is abrupt and uncouth ; with others it is polished and refined. One man startles you into attention : another steals into your consciousness almost unawares. Whatever enables a writer most effectually and most naturally to secure self-expression is style. And the excellence of that style is in proportion to its sincerity. As Mr Edmund Gosse has reminded us, sincerity is " the finest gift in literature and the most uncommon." It is, indeed, the only standard. All others are artificial and temporary. They may suit the prevailing taste in a particular age, or jump with a certain type of humour, but another age and an altered humour will be sure to revise very drastically any judgments made according to such canons. So Pope, whom Voltaire declared to be " the best poet of all England, and at present of all the world," is studiously neglected by a later generation, while John Bunyan, who is to Addison,

so Hume asserts, as the molehill to the mountain, has been translated into eighty languages and dialects. Horace Walpole, " the glass of fashion " in his day, was as far from the truth as fashionable judges usually are when he said that the first writers in England in 1753 were Lord Chesterfield, Lord Bath, Mr W. Whithed, Sir Charles Williams, Mr Soame Jenyns, Mr Cambridge, and Mr Coventry. So to-day we are led to despise Tennyson because he did not write *vers libre*, and to glorify the ' Georgian ' poet because he so plainly shows his contempt for all the forms that the Victorian deemed sacrosanct. With the good bookman the capital error is intolerance, and such considerations have little weight. He takes delight in watching the unfolding of divers personalities in widely varying ways, and he learns to be humble and catholic in his taste. He can admire *In Memoriam* as well as *Fleet Street Eclogues* : his appreciation of H. G. Wells is not lessened because he persists in seeing some good in Walter Pater.

Too often, however, abruptness and brutality of expression are regarded as the distinguishing mark of sincerity. It is possible to make a pose of uncouthness. The æsthete on his knees before a blue china vase and the iconoclast who rudely smashes the idol are probably both *poseurs*. They are alike in a desire to draw attention to themselves : the precise method they choose for so doing is a matter of comparative indifference. The need of sincerity has been emphasized in connexion with all the various literary devices that we have been considering. Again and again in these pages it has been urged that contrast, rhythm, and verse-forms, assonance, consonance, and figures of speech are not, in true literature, superficial ornaments or exhibitions of verbal jugglery : they are

rather the results that arise naturally and inevitably from the harmony wrought by spirit between mind and matter, and spirit is but another name for personality. If the resultant expression is not sincere, then it has no claim to be called literature. Those who clamour for beauty of form regardless of content, and those who insist upon truth of matter careless of the form, are at cross-purposes. There can be no real beauty of form without truth, and truth would be false to its own nature did it not clothe itself in a garb that is fitting and beautiful. The supposed opposition simply does not exist.

> " Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

John Sterling's attempts to reform Carlyle's style form the most piquant feature of the *Life of Sterling*. Carlyle submitted to treatment more good-humouredly than might be expected, but without avail. As he characteristically puts it (ch. iii), " This is not your suit of clothes, it must be another's." There is an excellent paper on Ruskin's style in Sir Edward Cook's *Literary Recreations*, while Ruskin himself deals with the general question of style in *Lectures on Art* (III). The necessity of sincerity on which he lays so much stress is emphasized by any and every writer of moment who has put down his thoughts on the subject. Another example of the influence of environment may be seen in Church's *Spenser* (p. 88), where the author says, " It is idle to speculate what difference of form the *Faerie Queene* might have received, if the design had been carried out in the peace of England and in the society of London. But it is certain that the scene of trouble and danger in which it grew up greatly affected it." Lascelles Abercrombie uses this idea

in *The Epic* to show the difference between Homer and Beowulf. Reference may also be made to Willmott's *Pleasures of Literature* (ch. viii) and Hamerton's *Intellectual Life* (Part XII, Letter I). J. W. Mackail in *Latin Literature* draws attention to interesting parallels between that literature and our own. In a footnote to p. 385 of *An Introduction to the Study of Literature* W. H. Hudson quotes two or three striking examples of contemporary criticism.

EXERCISES

1. Read the following passages carefully, noting any peculiarities of style that seem to betray the authorship. Say to what conclusion you are led in each case.

(*a*)

Music do I hear ?
Ha ! Ha ! keep time. How sour sweet music is
When time is broke and no proportion kept !
So is it in the music of men's lives.
And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disorder'd string ;
But for the concord of my state and time
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
I wasted time, and now doth time waste me ;
For now hath time made me his numbering clock :
My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar
Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,
Whereto my finger, like a dial's point,
Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears.

(*b*) When you are past shrieking, having no human articulate voice to say you are glad with, you fill the quietude of their valleys with gunpowder blasts, and rush home, red with cutaneous eruption of conceit, and voluble with convulsive hiccough of self-satisfaction. I think nearly the two sorrowfullest spectacles I have ever seen in humanity, taking the deep inner significance of them, are the English mobs in the valley of Chamouni, amusing themselves with firing rusty howitzers ; and the Swiss vintagers of Zurich expressing their Christian thanks for the gift of the vine, by assembling in knots in the " towers of the vineyards," and slowly loading and firing horse-pistols from morning till evening.

(*c*) But follow ; let the torrent dance thee down
To find him in the valley ; let the wild
Lean-headed Eagles yelp alone, and leave
The monstrous ledges there to slope, and spill
Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke,
That like a broken purpose waste in air :
So waste not thou.

(*d*) But you don't know music ! Wherefore
Keep on casting pearls
To a—poet ! All I care for
Is—to tell him that a girl's
" Love " comes aptly in when gruff
Grows his singing. (There, enough !)

2. Ruskin says, " No noble or right style was ever yet founded but out of a sincere heart." Discuss and illustrate this.

3. Show the reaction of environment on style in the case of Byron and Burns respectively.

4. Give examples of literary mannerisms other than those mentioned in the text.

5. " There must be," says Emerson, " a man behind the book." Discuss this, adding the most noteworthy examples that occur to you.

CHAPTER XII

THE SUBLIME

Sublimity is the echo of a great soul.
LONGINUS

AS we noted in a preceding chapter, it has been said that for the true appreciation of the best of the Waverley novels it is necessary to read them through at least six times. Certainly it cannot be disputed that if a book is worth reading at all it is worth rereading. Only thus can the reader have the opportunity of noting some of the many delights of literature. While he will not be so foolish as to despise that elemental pleasure in the breathless rush with which a vivacious story-teller carries him from point to point, he will nevertheless find it well worth while to retrace his steps and survey the ground at greater leisure. So he will be able to cast a delighted eye upon beautiful scenes lurking in unexpected corners, and catch sweet melodies that would be quite inaudible in the hurly-burly. He will have time, too, to study the personality of his author and guide, and to recognize in his tones that sincerity which is the unfailing mark of all memorable writing.

We have seen how differently personalities express themselves, and that it would be useless to expect the precision of Addison from Carlyle, for example, or the breadth of Charles Dickens from Jane Austen. In the same way it is found that the work of one author is by no means all upon one level. There are few, if any,

writers whom we can classify, without qualification, as first-, second-, or third-rate. The greatest will suddenly lapse into the banal, and astonish the devotee who has been fed exclusively upon choice snippets ; while even the worst will upon occasion approach the sublime heights so nearly as to confound the critics. At times maximum power will happily coincide with maximum opportunity ; personality at its highest will find fitting expression ; and the greatness of the soul will be echoed in the writing : then, and then only, we have the truly sublime.

The sublime knows no rules—at least, none that can be applied by any outside authority. Longinus, it is true, speaks of the necessity of the curb as well as the spur for Pegasus, and shows that it is in the highest flights of grandeur that the writer is in greatest danger of losing his balance. But only the writer himself can guard effectively against that danger. No theoretical directions given him before he makes the ascent will insure that he will be able to cope successfully with unexpected difficulties. He must, in the event, depend upon his own resourcefulness. So, in this matter of the sublime, the critic has to beware of hasty judgments, and will find it best to preserve a becoming humility. Prognostications are vain as often as not. A writer, the general level of whose work encourages one to believe that he will accomplish the great feat, may prove a sad disappointment after all ; while another who has been contemptuously disregarded does it while the critic's back is turned. The sublime crops up in all manner of unexpected places : it keeps strange company at times. Herein is seen the wisdom of that wise tolerance for which a plea was made in an earlier chapter. If we allow prejudice to blind us to the sublime in work which bears the stamp of an alien

creed or party, then assuredly the loss is ours. Or if, as is yet more likely, we allow ourselves to be affected by priggishness of taste so as to declare that no good can possibly come out of Nazareth, then we are wilfully limiting our range. That great man, John Henry Newman, never showed his greatness more than when, addressing the students of a Catholic university, he paid generous and ungrudging tribute to the sublimity of Protestant literature. There are, it must be emphasized, neither rules nor boundaries in this matter. Here a painstaking writer misses the highest, while there another achieves it with an apparently undisciplined exuberance that defies all the canons. You may light upon it in the dustiest corners. A jewel will often dazzle you in the dark basement where forgotten tomes repose. It may occur in prose as well as in verse ; in a sermon as well as in a novel. It may even appear in that most despised of all literary efforts—a book about books. You will remember how the reading of Longinus moved the cold and sceptical Gibbon to enthusiasm, so that he declared : "I almost doubt which is more sublime, Homer's Battle of the Gods, or Longinus's Apostrophe to Terentianus upon it." Neither are there any restrictions to be laid down with regard to the subject-matter. One writer will find a sublime subject in a wayside flower or a peasant child ; another in a sounding cataract or a devastating storm ; yet another in chimney-pots or a city slum. Or the same poet may sing at one moment of

> Old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago,

and again just as sweetly of

> Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
> That has been, and may be again.

Here again the reader must be catholic in his taste: neither realist nor romanticist has a monopoly. Coleridge will see the sublime in " the stately pleasure dome "

> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns measureless to man
> Down to a sunless sea;

whereas Masefield will say:

> Mine be a handful of ashes, a mouthful of mould,
> Of the maimed, of the halt, and the blind in the rain and the cold—
> Of these shall my songs be fashioned, my tales be told.

This is one of the chief delights of reading. We are for ever being taken by surprise. There is always the possibility that a bit of superb expression is lurking overleaf, and the humblest reader is as likely to meet with unsuspected beauties as the most learned professor. There is nothing like literature, rightly used, for encouraging self-reliance, or for bringing out the essential nobility in both reader and writer. The idea that reading turns a man into a mere bookworm, and unfits him for the practical duties of life, is as baseless as the kindred notion that literature is opposed to life. As Emerson tells us, " All that Shakespeare says of the king, yonder slip of a boy that reads in the corner feels to be true of himself." So the recognition of the sublime, where all the literary qualities and devices that we have been discussing are found doing their perfect work, is the reward that awaits the reader. And the recognition of sublimity in the author's work inevitably calls forth in response all the sublimity of which the reader is capable. Julius Cæsar, referring to some political prisoners whom he had set free, wrote thus to Cicero:

> I triumph and rejoice that my action should have secured your approval. Nor am I disturbed when I hear it said that those, whom I have sent off alive and free, will again bear arms against me; for there is nothing which I so much covet as that I should be like myself and they like themselves.

In the margin against that passage Macaulay wrote the words, "Noble fellow!" It is indeed sublime—the echoing of a great soul—and the recognition of it as convincing a testimony as could be desired to the nobility of Macaulay himself. And for a modern counterpart of that wonderful magnanimity let us pass to a magnificent chapter in *The Cities of Spain*, where Edward Hutton tells how he visited the monastery of Santo Tomàs, and, asking the Father to show him anything within that was noteworthy, found that he was strangely reluctant. "Perhaps to-morrow," was all that he would say. Mr Hutton then returned to Avila, to find it occupied by a party of tourists under the leadership of one who was loudly boasting of how he had spat upon the grave of Torquemada at Santo Tomàs. Our author continues:

> It was night when I returned to Santo Tomàs, but the Father was waiting for me in the Sacristy. After a minute he said, "My son, you are troubled, you are angry, what has happened? It is not well to sleep when one is angry." And somehow I told him all. Once or twice he smiled, but there were tears in his eyes as he led me, in the midst of that great room, to the bare slab of slate beneath which Torquemada sleeps. "It is true," he said, "we have forgiven him." There was a long silence, and then with a great deference he turned towards me and said, "If you will, señor, we will pray for him, and for us all, because—is it not so?—where one who is in trouble is left unaided, there passes an executioner; and where two or three are gathered together in unkindness, there is the Inquisition." As

> we knelt I saw him wipe away the mark of scorn from the grave with the sleeve of his cloak.

The manifest sincerity of that passage and its splendid reticence surely justify its inclusion as an example of the sublime.

However inadvisable it may be to attempt to hedge round sublimity with rules, it may be asserted with confidence that it is not a piece of artifice—a bit of fine writing superimposed so as to give distinction to the mass of dull, journeyman stuff. Hilaire Belloc playfully says that he thinks that the best way of ending a book " is to rummage about among one's manuscripts till one has found a bit of Fine Writing (no matter upon what subject), to lead up the last paragraphs by no matter what violent shocks to the thing it deals with, to introduce a row of asterisks, and then to paste on to the paper below these the Fine Writing one has found." There is certainly much of this fine writing in existence, and it is perfectly true that it matters little where it is put. After all, it is in itself but a harmless flourish. The harm enters when fine writing is confused with the sublime—a mistake which no thoughtful reader can be forgiven for making. One is an artificial ornament : the other is a natural growth. The beautiful song,

> Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
> Nor thē furious winter's rages,

that Guiderius and Arviragus sang over the body of Cloten is not a bit of fine writing ' stuck on ' : we cannot for one moment regard it as a *tour de force* that Shakespeare kept in reserve until he should come upon a blank space that it would fit. It has, it is true, a beauty of its own that remains even when it is torn from its con-

text, but unless it comes, as it were, straight from the mouths of the singers it cannot be appreciated to the full. So George Meredith's sweet nocturne,

> Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
> Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star.
> Lone on the fir-branch, his rattle-note unvaried,
> Brooding o'er the gloom, spins the brown evejar,

is charming in itself; but read the whole of *Love in the Valley* and it takes on a new glory. And the pathetic significance of John Clare's plaint,

> I am! yet what I am who cares or knows?
> My friends forsake me like a memory lost;
> I am the self-consumer of my woes,
> They rise and vanish, an oblivious host,
> Like shades in love and death's oblivion lost;
> And yet I am!

is missed unless all the circumstances of his sad career are known.

The sublime, then, is most emphatically not a bit of clever craftsmanship displayed in such a manner as to attract the reader's attention. Nor is it necessarily violent or obtrusive. "They are," as Ruskin reminds us in *Modern Painters*, "but the blunt and the low faculties of our nature which can only be addressed through lamp-black and lightning. It is in quiet and subdued passages of unobtrusive majesty, the deep, and the calm, and the perpetual; that which must be sought ere it is seen, and loved ere it is understood . . . that the lesson of devotion is chiefly taught, and the blessing of beauty given." And what is true of pictorial art is true also of literature. "That which must be *sought*," says Ruskin, and in this matter of the sublime the necessity of diligent, personal search cannot be

over-emphasized. It is so easy to admire by proxy, and to rest upon the comforting assurance that as others have laboured all that we need do is to enter into their labours. Yet the search can only be effective when carried out in person. Others may go before and point the way, but we must follow. Little of real gain will be ours if we sit at home expecting the jewels to be brought to us without effort on our part. Anthologies, indeed, have subtle dangers of their own, in that they provide a short cut to the acquisition of knowledge that is, in itself, worthless and even harmful. It has been pointed out that a collection of the choicest passages, wrongly used, will serve to lower the taste instead of raising it, like a diet exclusively composed of highly seasoned food and stimulating drinks. The easy credit for wide reading that may be obtained by the cultivation of anthologies is a snare which every reader has sooner or later to learn to avoid.

Yet it is a very old and sound principle that "the abuse of a thing doth not take away the lawful use thereof," and while the misuse of collections of literary 'gems' has undoubtedly been responsible for much harm, it would be foolish in the extreme to neglect, on that account, the help that a good anthology is able to give. "Private readers," says Emerson, "reading purely for love of the book, would serve us by leaving each the shortest note of what he has found." This is precisely what the good anthologist does, and it is well for us to compare notes with him. So we may experience the delight of confirmation—here is a man who agrees with me that such-and-such a piece is worthy of a place among the best. Or we may be driven to make a salutary and humble confession—here is one who, fishing in the

same waters, has made a catch where I could find nothing. Or again, we may be roused to dissent because to us some of the inclusions are as incomprehensible as the exclusions. However this may be, the chief advantages to be gained from the study of any such collection are that it sends us back to old favourites and, maybe, reveals new excellences in them, and also that it shows where there is new and fruitful ground to be explored.

In *The Golden Treasury*, for example, the devoted skill of Palgrave gives the gem a fresh setting and places it in a new light. As he tells us, he discards the rigidly chronological sequence and arranges the pieces instead "in gradations of feeling and subject." The result is the production of a volume that must ever be dear to the lover of English poetry. So Wordsworth's *Green Linnet* and *Cuckoo* are placed side by side with Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*. By this arrangement, as David Somervell points out in his *Companion to the Golden Treasury*, each poem is made to act as an illuminating commentary upon the others. In the first the poet describes the bird as he sees it: his observation is keener and his expression more just than anything which most of us could do for ourselves, yet for all that it remains but simple observation. In the second Wordsworth describes the cry of the cuckoo, but he proceeds to give expression to the thought that he has changed since as a boy he first listened to that selfsame song; thus the simple act of observing is carried on a stage further and becomes a reflection. Then Keats in the third poem just catches the notes of the nightingale's song and goes off into a wonderful day-dream that he unfolds in one of the finest odes in our tongue. To set one poem against another in this way is an exercise at once delightful and instructive.

But, formally or informally, each one as he reads should be busy about the making of his own anthology—the only one that for him can really satisfy. In that fine collection, *The Spirit of Man*, made by the Poet Laureate we have a model of what such an anthology should be. Here a wise and gifted reader has noted down sublimities as he found them and has passed on the notes for our use and encouragement. The breadth of vision and the fine taste required for such a compilation are given to few, but every reader has a personality of his own and the value of an anthology of this kind lies in the fact that it expresses the personality of the reader even as the selections themselves show forth those of the several writers. The making of such a collection in a catholic and humble spirit will be one of the most valuable and individual acts of which the reader is capable. Thus he will express his own preferences to himself, and therefore, while he will neglect no means of raising his standard of judgment, he will allow neither tradition nor fashion to have undue sway. The very act of setting down upon paper that which he sincerely feels to be memorable writing will do more to teach him to discipline his taste than any theoretical instructions or warnings could possibly do. Most effectually he will be his own judge ; for, from time to time, he will amend and reject, either confirming or modifying his former selections as a broader experience and more delicate appreciation dictate. Some old favourites, being found not to wear well, he will reject firmly, yet not without a pardonable reluctance : other new discoveries he will add as a sign that his love of literature is alive—ever growing and expanding. To those passages that remain he will constantly recur until they form

part of his being, the very crown of all his reading, and a never-failing treasure-store from which he may draw solace and inspiration.

ILLUSTRATIVE READING

There is a delightful chapter in Sir Edward Cook's *Literary Recreations* entitled "A Study in Superlatives" that will amply repay reading. David Somervell's *Companion to the Golden Treasury* is invaluable—a model of what such a commentary should be. Robert Bridges' anthology, *The Spirit of Man*, cannot be too strongly recommended to those readers who are attempting to make anthologies for themselves. The volumes in the "Poetry and Life" series (Harrap) are very helpful in that they give just that knowledge of the poet's life and circumstances which is essential to a sympathetic understanding of his work. Several examples of reticence were cited in connexion with Chapter IX; to these may be added, as showing the sublimity of restraint, Plutarch's *Leuctra*, the description of Waterloo in *Vanity Fair*, and Milton's account of the death of Samson. Above all, the student should read and reread *Longinus on the Sublime*, of which there is a rendering by A. O. Prickard in the "Oxford Library of Translations."

EXERCISES

1. Rupert Brooke irreverently referred to Tennyson as "that old fool." A *Morning Post* critic dismissed Carlyle as "a Prussian parasite whose style so often resembles coal arriving next door." Taking these two statements for a text, write on "Fashion in Literature."

2. "Nobody ever yet agreed with anybody else's golden treasury of elegant extracts." Criticize any well-known anthology, specifying omissions and additions that you would wish to make.

3. Discuss the claims of the following to sublimity:

(*a*) Dickens's description of the death of little Paul Dombey.
(*b*) Lamb's *Dream Children.*
(*c*) *Casabianca.*
(*d*) Addison's paper on the death of Sir Roger.
(*e*) Browning's *Sordello.*
(*f*) Shakespeare's sonnet, "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought."

4. Comment on the following groups of poems, and note what light each in a group sheds upon the other:

(*a*) *Youth and Age* (Byron).
The Lesser Celandine (Wordsworth).
(*b*) *Proud Maisie* (Scott).
The Bridge of Sighs (Hood).
(*c*) *To the Skylark* (Wordsworth).
To a Skylark (Shelley).
(*d*) *Youth and Age* (Coleridge).
The River of Life (Campbell).

5. Sir Arthur Helps makes one of the characters in *Friends in Council* speak with approval of "the divine art of skipping" as one that should be exercised by both readers and writers. Set down your own ideas on the subject.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. It has been said that " Poetry sets the hardest lessons to music." Enlarge upon this statement, adding any illustrations that may occur to you.

2. What would you say to a critic who objected to Keats's sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* because Chapman's is not a good translation and because it was not Cortez who " stared at the Pacific " ?

3. Say whether you think the following lines are prose or verse. Give reasons for your opinion.

(*a*) Was this the face that faced so many follies ?

(*b*) Oh—you queens—you queens ; among the hills and happy greenwood of this land of yours.

(*c*) What's become of Waring since he gave us all the slip ?

(*d*) But in this tournament can no man tilt.

(*e*) Moses and the Prophets ! Does the old lady intend to marry me ?

4. Give examples of the various forms of recurrence that are found in literature.

5. Show, with illustrations, how movement in prose may be accelerated or retarded.

6. " Literature is the immortality of speech." Say what you think of this as a definition.

7. Emerson says, " There is no choice of words for him who clearly sees the truth. That provides him with the best word." Discuss this statement.

8. Comment on the suitability of the following figurative expressions :

(*a*) 'Zounds ! I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy, though he be dead.

(*b*) A glorious world
Fresh as a banner bright, unfurl'd
To music suddenly.

(*c*) Dew-drops are the gems of morning,
But the tears of mournful eve!

(*d*) The sweet buds . . .
Had not yet lost their starry diadems
Caught from the early sobbing of the morn.

(*e*) The woman opened her eyes. The fainting-fit left the rouge like an unnatural island on her yellow cheeks, the lines and wrinkles in her face had become more apparent than ever.

(*f*) The rugged castle—I will not undertake to say how many hundreds of years ago then—was abandoned to the centuries of weather which have so defaced the dark apertures in its walls, that the ruin looks as if the rooks and daws had pecked its eyes out.

9. Comment on the suitability of the verse-forms chosen in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Burns's *Cottar's Saturday Night*.

10. Discuss the appropriateness of the line-length in the following passages:

(*a*) A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

W. H. DAVIES

(*b*) Very old are we men;
Our dreams are tales
Told in dim Eden
By Eve's nightingales.

W. DE LA MARE

(*c*) We are puppets, Man in his pride, and Beauty fair in her flower;
Do we move ourselves, or are moved by an unseen hand at a game
That pushes us off from the board, and others ever succeed?

TENNYSON

(*d*) Time, you old gipsy man,
Will you not stay,
Put up your caravan
Just for one day?

RALPH HODGSON

11. Write detailed accounts of the following imaginary works: (*a*) A psychological novel by Shakespeare; (*b*) A light comedy by Milton; (*c*) A book of lyrics by Edward Gibbon. Make

special reference to the way in which each writer handles the literary form he is supposed to have chosen.

12. Give an account of an imaginary conversation between (*a*) Hamlet and Shakespeare; (*b*) Satan and Milton.

13. Quote some notable examples of reticence in literature.

14. Examine the following passages and comment on their main literary features:

(*a*)
And through his veins there ran
A strange oblivious trouble, darkening sense
Till he knew nothing but a hideous fear
Which bade him fly. ROBERT BRIDGES

(*b*)
Faster, faster,
O Circe, Goddess,
Let the wild thronging train,
The bright procession
Of eddying forms,
Sweep through my soul.
MATTHEW ARNOLD

(*c*)
I saw a smith stand with his hammer, thus,
The whilst his iron did on the anvil cool,
With open mouth swallowing a tailor's news;
Who, with his shears and measure in his hand,
Standing on slippers, which his nimble haste
Had falsely thrust upon contrary feet,
Told of a many thousand war-like French,
That were embattailed and rank'd in Kent.
SHAKESPEARE

(*d*)
Old Yew, which graspest at the stones
That name the under-lying dead,
Thy fibres net the dreamless head,
Thy roots are wrapt about the bones.
TENNYSON

(*e*)
For Sorrow, like a heavy hanging bell,
Once set on ringing with his own weight goes.
SHAKESPEARE

15. The sonnet has been humorously called an "apartment for single gentlemen in verse." Add your own comments on this view.

16. Comment upon the prose-rhythm of the following extracts:

(*a*) To call such a man 'ambitious,' to figure him as the prurient windbag described above, seems to me the poorest solecism. Such a man will say: "Keep your gilt carriages and huzzaing

mobs, keep your red-tape clerks, your influentialities, your important businesses. Leave me alone, leave me alone ; there is *too much of life* in me already ! " Old Samuel Johnson, the greatest soul in England in his day, was not ambitious. ' Corsica Boswell ' flaunted at public shows with printed ribbons round his hat ; but the great old Samuel stayed at home. The world-wide soul wrapt-up in its thoughts, in its sorrows ;—what could paradings, and ribbons in the hat, do for it ? CARLYLE

(*b*) Magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom ; and a great empire and little minds go ill together. If we are conscious of our station, and glow with zeal to fill our places as becomes our situation and ourselves, we ought to auspicate all our public proceedings on America with the old warning of the church, *Sursum corda !* We ought to elevate our minds to the greatness of that trust to which the order of Providence has called us. By adverting to the dignity of this high calling, our ancestors have turned a savage wilderness into a glorious empire ; and have made the most extensive, and the only honourable conquests, not by destroying, but by promoting the wealth, the number, the happiness, of the human race. BURKE

(*c*) William denied that he was guilty of temerity. It was, he said, from a sense of duty, and on a cool calculation of what the public interest required, that he was always at the post of danger. The troops which he had commanded had been little used to war, and shrank from a close encounter with the veteran soldiery of France. It was necessary that their leader should show them how battles were to be won. And in truth more than one day which had seemed hopelessly lost was retrieved by the hardihood with which he rallied his broken battalions and cut down the cowards who set the example of flight. Sometimes, however, it seemed that he had a strange pleasure in venturing his person. It was remarked that his spirits were never so high and his manners never so gracious and easy as amidst the tumult and carnage of a battle. MACAULAY

(*d*) I was this morning surprised with a great knocking at the door, when my landlady's daughter came up to me and told me, that there was a man below desired to speak with me. Upon my asking her who it was, she told me it was a very grave elderly person, but that she did not know his name. I immediately went down to him, and found him to be the coachman of my worthy friend Sir Roger de Coverley. He told me that his master came to town last night, and would be glad to take a turn with me in Gray's-inn walks. ADDISON

17. Sir Edward Cook points out that while Perdita calls a violet ' dim,' Milton's epithet is ' glowing.' He asks why. What answer could you give to this question ?

18. Comment on the length of the words in the following passages :

(*a*) Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :
" Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Thro' this blind maze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world."

TENNYSON

(*b*) O Prince, O chief of many thronèd Powr's,
That led th' embattled Seraphim to war
Under thy conduct, and, in dreadful deeds
Fearless, endangered Heav'n's perpetual King,
And put to proof His high supremacy—
Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate—
Too well I see and rue the dire event
That with sad overthrow and foul defeat
Hath lost us Heav'n, and all this mighty host
In horrible destruction laid thus low,
As far as Gods and Heav'nly Essences
Can perish : for the mind and sp'rit remains
Invincible, and vigour soon returns,
Though all our glory extinct, and happy state
Here swallowed up in endless misery.

MILTON

19. Write an imaginary conversation between Samuel Richardson, Charles Dickens, and Compton Mackenzie on the modern novel.

20. In *Pencraft* Sir William Watson protests against " the reposeless journalese in which a bullet invariably *sings* ; an aeroplane never forgets to *drone* ; and a shell can be trusted at

all times to *scream.*" Give any similar examples that you have noticed in your own reading.

21. Say whether you think the following are good descriptions, and specify any merits or weaknesses that you may observe :

(*a*) She dropped an envelope upon which she had been making minute financial calculations, and went with an impatient movement to fling the window wide and allow the smell of cooking to escape. Her room was on the topmost floor. The wallpaper was patterned and dingy, the ewer had been riveted, the bedspread was tinged with a grey which told of a long career of visits to cheap laundries. Outside there was a vista of chimney-stacks and slate roofs, of sooty walls and telegraph posts. A dejected cat prowled over the nearest roof in the furtive way of his tribe. A dank tress of ivy, half-killed by the blacks, trailed over the wall of the adjoining yard. The sky, already lowering, was murkied by the smoke-polluted atmosphere.

" If there were only something nice to look at," thought Anne with a sigh. E. S. Stevens

(*b*) The top of the house was worthy of notice. There was a sort of terrace on the roof, with posts and fragments of rotten lines, once intended to dry clothes upon ; and there were two or three tea-chests out there, full of earth, with forgotten plants in them, like old walking-sticks. Whoever climbed to this observatory, was stunned at first from having knocked his head against the little door in coming out ; and after that, was for the moment choked from having looked, perforce, straight down the kitchen chimney ; but these two stages over, there were things to gaze at from the top of Todgers's, well worth your seeing too. For first and foremost, if the day were bright, you observed upon the housetops, stretching far away, a long dark path : the shadow of the Monument ; and turning round, the tall original was close beside you, with every hair erect upon his golden head, as if the doings of the city frightened him. Then there were steeples, towers, belfries, shining vanes, and masts of ships : a very forest. Gables, housetops, garret-windows, wilderness upon wilderness. Smoke and noise enough for all the world at once. Dickens

22. Write critical notes on the following, concentrating upon unity, contrast, literary form, and any special literary devices used : *The Pickwick Papers*, Newman's *Apologia*, Browning's *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St Praxed's Church*, Tennyson's *Maud*, Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, Carlyle's *Past and Present*, and Shakespeare's *Henry V*.

23. The following speeches were both made by Eugene Wrayburn (in *Our Mutual Friend*) respecting a third person. Show that the difference of rhythm is appropriate:

(*a*) "Yes, regarding my respected father," assented Eugene, settling himself in his arm-chair. "I would rather have approached my respected father by candlelight, as a theme requiring a little artificial brilliancy; but we will take him by twilight, enlivened with a glow of Wallsend."

(*b*) "Faith we DO!" returned Eugene, with great animation. "We may hide behind the bush and beat about it, but we DO. Now my wife is something nearer to my heart, Mortimer, than Tippins is, and I owe her a little more than I owe to Tippins, and I am rather prouder of her than I ever was of Tippins. Therefore, I will fight it out to the last gasp, with her and for her, here in the open field. When I hide her, or strike for her, faint-heartedly, in a hole or a corner, do you, whom I love next best upon earth, tell me what I shall most righteously deserve to be told:—that she would have done well to have turned me over with her foot that night when I lay bleeding to death, and to have spat in my dastard face."

24. Criticize the following passages, pointing out any noteworthy features in rhythm, recurrence, diction, letter-values, or general effect:

(*a*)

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. WORDSWORTH

(*b*) There are sorrows, it is true, so great, that to give them some of the ordinary vents is to run a hazard of being overthrown. These we must rather strengthen ourselves to resist, or bow quietly and drily down, in order to let them pass over us as the traveller does the wind of the desert. But where we feel that tears would relieve us, it is false philosophy to deny ourselves at least that first refreshment; and it is always false consolation to tell people that because they cannot help a thing, they are not to mind it. The true way

is to let them grapple with the unavoidable sorrow, and try to win it into gentleness by a reasonable yielding. There are griefs so gentle in their very nature that it would be worse than false heroism to refuse them a tear. Of this kind are the deaths of infants. LEIGH HUNT

(*c*) My silks and fine array,
My smiles and languished air,
By Love are driven away ;
And mournful lean Despair
Brings me yew to deck my grave :
Such end true lovers have.

BLAKE

(*d*) For every war, a motive of safety or revenge, of honour or zeal, of right or convenience, may be readily found in the jurisprudence of conquerors. No sooner had Timour re-united to the patrimony of Zagatai the dependent countries of Carizme and Candahar, than he turned his eyes towards the kingdoms of Iran or Persia. From the Oxus to the Tigris, that extensive country was left without a lawful sovereign since the death of Abousaid, the last of the descendants of the great Houlacou. GIBBON

(*e*) This, then, is to be a story, may it please you, in which jackdaws will wear peacocks' feathers, and awaken the just ridicule of the peacocks ; in which, while every justice is done to the peacocks themselves, the splendour of their plumage, the gorgeousness of their dazzling necks, and the magnificence of their tails, exception will yet be taken to the absurdity of their rickety strut, and the foolish discord of their pert squeaking ; in which lions in love will have their claws pared by sly virgins ; in which rogues will sometimes triumph, and honest folks, let us hope, come by their own ; in which there will be black crape and white favours ; in which there will be tears under orange-flower wreaths, and jokes in mourning-coaches ; in which there will be dinners of herbs with contentment and without, and banquets of stalled oxen where there is care and hatred—ay, and kindness and friendship too, along with the feast. THACKERAY

(*f*) The accumulated murmur of soft plashing,
Of waves on rocks dashing and searching the sands,
Takes my ear, in the veering
Baffled wind as rearing
Upright at the cliff, to the gullies and rifts he stands ;
And his conquering surges scour out over the lands ;

While again at the foot of the downs
He masses his strength to recover the topmost crowns.
ROBERT BRIDGES

25. Compile a list of the books (to be limited to twelve volumes) that you would like to take with you on an Antarctic expedition.

26. Dr Johnson advises us to read the book that we honestly feel a wish and a curiosity to read. Say what you think of this advice.

27. Imagine that the following poems had been written in prose instead of in verse-form : do you consider that they would have gained or lost by the change ?

(*a*) Pope's *Essay on Man.*
(*b*) Macaulay's *Horatius.*
(*c*) Mrs Browning's *Aurora Leigh.*
(*d*) Browning's *Bishop Blougram's Apology.*

28. Write a comparative study of any two poems by different writers on the same or kindred subjects.

29. Describe an imaginary interview with one of Shakespeare's villains immediately after the final scene of the play.

30. Suppose that one of the following works has appeared to-day for the first time ; give a review of it as you think it might be done in one of the daily papers : Pope's *Essay on Criticism,* Browning's *Sordello,* Shakespeare's sonnets, Scott's *Waverley,* Tennyson's *Maud.*

BOOKS FOR REFERENCE AND FURTHER STUDY

(*A*) General Literary Appreciation

Gayley and Scott. *Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism* (Ginn).

Hudson, W. H. *An Introduction to the Study of Literature* (Harrap).

Moulton, R. G. *The Modern Study of Literature* (Chicago University Press).

Quiller-Couch, Sir A. *On the Art of Reading* (Cambridge University Press).

Willmott, R. A. *The Pleasures of Literature* (Sunday School Union).

Winchester, C. T. *Some Principles of Literary Criticism* (Macmillan).

(*B*) The Appreciation of Poetry

Brown, Stephen J., S.J. *The Realm of Poetry* (Harrap).

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